THE UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
LIBRARY
823
M55
1918
v.9

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

https://archive.org/details/worksofleonardme09merr

THE WORKS OF LEONARD MERRICK

· ONE · MAN'S · VIEW ·

The Works of

LEONARD MERRICK

WHILE PARIS LAUGHED.

UNIFORM WITH THE ABOVE

CONRAD IN QUEST OF HIS YOUTH. With an Introduction by SIR J. M. BARRIE.

WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE WINDOW. With an Introduction by SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL.

THE QUAINT COMPANIONS. With an Introduction by H. G. WELLS.

THE POSITION OF PEGGY HARPER. With an Introduction by SIR ARTHUR PINERO.

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD WOMEN and other Stories. With an Introduction by W. J. LOCKE.

THE WORLDLINGS. With an Introduction by NEIL MUNRO.

THE ACTOR-MANAGER. With an Introduction by W. D. HOWELLS.

CYNTHIA. With an Introduction by MAURICE HEWLETT.

ONE MAN'S VIEW. With an Introduction by GRANVILLE BARKER.

THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD. With an Introduction by J. K. PROTHERO.

A CHAIR ON THE BOULEVARD. With an Introduction by A. NEIL LYONS.

THE HOUSE OF LYNCH. With an Introduction by G. K. CHESTERTON.

HODDER & STOUGHTON, *Publishers*, LONDON.

ONE MAN'S VIEW

BY LEONARD MERRICK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

GRANVILLE BARKER

HODDER & STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BRUNSWICK ST., STAMFORD ST., S.E. 1,
AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

823
M55
1918
v.9

English

INTRODUCTION

This story can be said to date, though quite in the sense that a story legitimately may. It is historic, though that is not to say old-fashioned. If one searches by internal evidence for the time of its writing, 1889 might be a safe guess. It was about then that many Londoners (besides the American girls in the story) were given their first glimpse of Niagara at the Panorama near Victoria Street. The building is a motor garage now; it lies beneath the cliffs of Queen Anne's Mansions; aeroplanes may rediscover its queer round roof. And it was in an ageing past too—for architectural ages veritably flash by in New York—that Broadway could be said to spread into the "brightness of Union Square." To-day there is but a chaos of dingy decay owning to that name. Soon it will be smart sky-scrapers, no doubt; when the tide of business has covered it, as now the tide of fashion leaves it derelict. Duluth, too, with its "store-keepers spitting on wooden sidewalks"!

427387

Duluth foresees a Lake Front that will rival Chicago.

But in such honest "dating," and in the inferences we may draw from it, lie perhaps some of the peculiar merits of Mr. Merrick's method—his straight telling of a tale. And digging to the heart of the book, the One Man's View of his faithless wife—more importantly too, the wife's view of herself—is, in a sense, an "historic" view. Not, of course, in its human essentials. Those must be true or false of this man and this woman whenever, however they lived and suffered. Such sufferings are dateless. And whether they are truly or falsely told, let the reader judge. No preface-writer need pre-judge for him. For in such things, the teller of the tale, from the heart of his subject, speaks straight to the heart and conscience of his audience, and will succeed or fail by no measurable virtue of style or wit, but by the truth that is in him, by how much of it they are open to receive.

Look besides with ever so slightly an historical eye at the circumstances in which the lives of these two were set to grow, and to flourish or perish, as it was easier or harder to tend them. See the girl with her simple passion for the theatre—so apt a channel for her happy ambition as it appears—and that baulked, her

very life baulked. To-day, this war-day, and more surely for the immediate enfranchised to-morrow breaking so close, the same girl will turn her back light-heartedly on the glamour of that little tinselled world to many another prospect of self-fulfilment.

And the lawyer, lost in his law. If a Solicitor-Generalship is his aim, he will be worldly-wise enough, one hopes, to come home not too tired to make at least a passably attractive figure at his wife's well-chosen dinner-parties. Or is that phase of English government now also to pass? No; for probably a country will always be governed from its dinner-tables, while its well-being is finally determined by their quality! Mamie to-day, though, would be doing more than give dinners. It is a question if the Mamie of to-morrow will have time to.

And the literary flâneur—the half-hearted seducer of passionless ladies—is he out of date? Mr. Merrick implies the quite wholesome truth that he always was. Through books and bookish dreams—beautiful, wise dreams—lies the passage to life of many boys and girls. But the healthiest instincts in them are seeking still a real world in which it will be both sane and fine to live. Their dreams are mostly a hard test of it when it is found; and, oh, the pity if the finding it quite breaks their dream!

In sum, then, it was Mamie's tragedy to seek her realities during a phase of art and letters which, in their utter unreality, seemed to deny the very existence of any real world at all. Neither true art nor true letters then; they were so turning from reality with fear.

Are they still denying it to-day? If so this story does not date at all, and Mamie's tragedy is a tragedy of our time. For tragedy it is, even though in *One Man's View* she finds at last reposeful salvation of a sort. But our hope is better. And half our pleasure in the story and in its historical truth is the thought that, true author as he is, were he writing it to-day, and of to-day, Mr. Merrick would have written it just so much differently.

GRANVILLE BARKER.

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER I

THE idea was so foreign to his temperament that Heriot was reluctant to believe that he had entertained it even during a few seconds. He continued his way past the big pink house and the girl on the balcony, surprised at the interest roused in him by this chance discovery of her address. Of what consequence was it where she was staying? He had noticed her on the terrace, by the band-stand one morning, and admired her. In other words, he had unconsciously attributed to the possessor of a delicious complexion, and a pair of grey eyes, darkly fringed, vague characteristics to which she was probably a stranger. He had seen her the next day also, and the next—even hoped to see her; speculated quite idly what her social position might be, and how she came beside the impossible woman who accompanied her. All that was nothing; his purpose in coming to Eastbourne was to be trivial. But why the sense of gratification with which he had learnt where she lived?

As to the idea that had crossed his brain,

that was preposterous! Of course, since the pink house was a boarding establishment, he might, if he would, make her acquaintance by the simple expedient of removing there, but he did not know how he could have meditated such a step. It was the sort of semi-disreputable folly that a man a decade or so younger might commit and describe as a "lark." No doubt many men a decade or so younger would commit it. He could conceive that a freshly-painted balcony, displaying a pretty girl for an hour or two every afternoon, might serve to extend the clientèle of a boarding-house enormously, and wondered that more attention had not been paid to such a form of advertisement. For himself, however—— His hair was already thinning at the temples; solicitors were deferential to him, and his clerk was taking a villa in Brixton; for himself, it would not do!

Eastbourne was depressing, he reflected, as he strolled towards the dumpy Wish Tower. He was almost sorry that he hadn't gone to Sandhills and quartered himself on his brother for a week or two instead. Francis was always pleased to meet him of recent years, and no longer remarked early in the conversation that he was "overdrawn at Cox's." On the whole, Francis was not a bad fellow, and Sandhills and pheasants would have been livelier.

He stifled a yawn, and observed with relief that it was near the dinner-hour. In the evening he turned over the papers in the smoking-room. He perceived, as he often did perceive in the vacations, that he was lonely. Vacations were a mistake : early in one's career one could not afford them, and by the time one was able to afford them, the taste for holidays was gone. This hotel was dreary, too. The visitors were dull, and the cooking was indifferent. What could be more tedious than the meal from which he had just risen ?—the feeble soup, the flaccid fish, the uninterrupted view of the stout lady with the aquiline nose, and a red shawl across her shoulders. Now he was lolling on a morocco couch, fingering *The Field ;* two or three other men lay about, napping, or looking at *The Graphic.* There was a great deal of tobacco-smoke, and a little whisky; he might as well have stopped in town and gone to the Club. He wondered what they did in Belle Vue Mansion after dinner. Perhaps there was music, and the girl sang ? he could fancy that she sang well. Or they might have impromptu dances ? Personally he did not care for dancing, but even to see others enjoying themselves would be comparatively gay. After all, why should he not remove to Belle Vue Mansion if he wished ? He had attached a significance

to the step that it did not possess, making it appear absurd by the very absurdity of the consideration that he accorded it. He remembered the time when he would not have hesitated —those were the days when Francis was always "overdrawn at Cox's." Well, he had worked hard since then, and anything that Francis might have lent him had been repaid, and he had gradually acquired soberer views of life. Perhaps he might be said to have gone to an extreme, indeed, and taken the pledge! He sometimes felt old, and he was still in the thirties. Francis was the younger of the two of late, although he had a boy in the Brigade; but elder sons often kept young very long—it was easy for them, like the way of righteousness to a bishop. . . . A waiter cast an inquiring glance round the room, and, crossing to the sofa, handed him a card. Heriot read the name with astonishment; he had not seen the man for sixteen years, and even their irregular correspondence had died a natural death.

"My dear fellow!" he exclaimed in the hall. "Come inside."

In the past, of which he had just been thinking, he and Dick Cheriton had been staunch friends, none the less staunch because Cheriton was some years his senior. Dick had a studio in Howland Street then, and was going to set

the Academy on fire. In the meanwhile he wore a yellow necktie, and married madly, and smoked a clay pipe; he could not guarantee that he would be an R.A., but at least he was resolved that he would be a bohemian. He had some of the qualifications for artistic success, but little talent. When he discovered the fact beyond the possibility of mistake, he accepted a relative's offer of a commercial berth in the United States, and had his hair cut. The valedictory supper in the studio, at which he had renounced ambition, and solemnly burned all his canvases that the dealers would not buy, had been a very affecting spectacle.

"My dear fellow!" cried Heriot. "Come inside. This is a tremendous pleasure. When did you arrive?"

"Came over in the *Germanic*, ten days ago. It *is* you, then; I saw 'George Heriot' in the Visitors' List, and strolled round on the chance. I scarcely hoped—— How are you, old man? I'm mighty glad to see you—fact!"

"You've been here ten days?"

"Not here, no; I've only been in Eastbourne a few hours."

"You should have looked me up in town."

"I tried. Your chambers were shut."

"The hall-porter at the Club——"

"What club? You forget what an exile I am!"

"Have a drink? Well, upon my word, this is very jolly! Sit down; try one of these."

"Would you have recognised me?" asked Cheriton, stretching his legs, and lighting the cigar.

"You've changed," admitted Heriot; "it's a long time. I've changed too."

They regarded each other with a gaze of friendly criticism. Heriot noted with some surprise that the other's appearance savoured little of the American man of business, or of the man of business outside America. His hair, though less disordered than it had been in the Howland Street period, was still rather longer than is customary in the City. It was now grey, and became him admirably. He wore a black velvet jacket, and showed a glimpse of a deep crimson tie. He no longer looked a bohemian, but he had acquired the air of a celebrity.

"Have you come home for good, Cheriton?"

Cheriton shook his head.

"I guess the States have got me for life," he answered; "I'm only making a trip. And you? You're still at the Bar, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Heriot drily; "I'm still at the Bar." It is not agreeable, when you have

succeeded in a profession, to be asked if you are in it still. "I've travelled along the lines on which you left me—it doesn't make an exciting narrative. Chambers, court, and bed. A laundress or two has died in the interval. The thing pays better than it used to do, naturally; that's all."

"You're doing well?"

"I should have called it 'doing well' once; but we are all Olivers in our hearts. To-day——"

"Mistake!" said the elder man. "You wanted the Bar—you've got the Bar; you ought to be satisfied. Now *I*——"

"Yes?" said Heriot, as he paused. "How's the world used you, Cheriton? By the way, you never answered my last letter, I think."

"It was *you* who didn't answer *me*."

"I fancy not. You were going to Chicago, and I wrote——"

"I wrote after I arrived in Chicago."

"Well, it must be five years ago; we won't argue. What did you do in Chicago, Cheriton?"

"No good, sir. I went there with a patent horse-collar. Capital invention—not my own, I never invented anything!—but it didn't catch on. They seemed to take no interest in horse-collars; no money in it, not a cent!

After the horse-collar I started in the dry-goods trade; but I was burned out. From Chicago I went to Duluth; I've an hotel there to-day."

"An hotel?"

"That's so. It isn't a distinguished career, running a little hotel, but it's fairly easy. Compared with hustling with horse-collars it's luxurious. Duluth is not ideal, but what would you have! I make my way, and that's all I ask now. If I had my life over again——" He sighed. "If we could have our lives over again, eh, Heriot?"

"Humph!" said Heriot doubtfully; he was wondering if he could make any better use of his own—if he would be any livelier the next time he was eight-and-thirty. "I suppose we all blunder, of course."

"*You* are a young man yet; it's different for you; and you're in the profession of your choice: it's entirely different. We don't look at the thing from the same standpoint, Heriot."

"You don't mean that you regret giving up art?"

"Sir," said Cheriton mournfully, "it was the error I shall always regret. I wouldn't say as much to anybody else; I keep it here"—he tapped his velvet jacket—"but I had a gift, and I neglected it; I had power, and—and I run an hotel. When I reflect, man, there are

hours—well, it's no use crying over spilt milk; but to think of the position I should have made, and to contrast it with what I am, is bitter!" He swept back his wavy hair impatiently, and in the momentary pose looked more like a celebrity still.

Heriot could see that the cherished delusion gave him a melancholy pleasure, and was at a loss how to reply. "It was uphill work," he said at last. "Who can tell? Luck——"

"I was a lad, an impetuous lad; and I was handicapped—I married." The man with a failure to explain is always grateful to have married. "But I had the stuff in me, I had the temperament. 'Had' it? I have it now! I may keep an hotel, but I shall never be an hotel-keeper. God gave me my soul, sir; circumstances gave me an hotel. I mayn't paint any more, but an artist by nature I shall always be. I don't say it in any bragging spirit, Heriot; I should be happier if I didn't feel it. The commonplace man may be contented in the commonplace calling: he fills the rôle he was meant for. It's the poor devil like myself, who knows what he *might* have been, who suffers."

Heriot didn't pursue the subject; he puffed his cigar meditatively. After the effervescence subsides, such meetings must always have a

little sadness; he looked at the wrinkles that had gathered on his friend's face, and realised the crow's-feet on his own.

"You lost your wife, you wrote me?" he remarked, breaking a rather lengthy silence.

"In New York, yes — pneumonia. *You* never married, eh?"

"No. Do you stay over here long?"

"A month or two; I can't manage more. But I shall leave my girl in London. I've brought her with me, and she'll remain."

"Of course," said Heriot, "you have a child —of course you have! I remember a little thing tumbling about in Howland Street. She must be a woman, Cheriton?"

"Mamie is twenty-one. I want to see if I can do anything for her before I go back. She loathes Duluth; and she has talent. She'll live with my sister. I don't think you ever saw my sister, did you? She's a widow, and stagnates in Wandsworth—Mamie will be company for her."

"Your daughter paints?"

"No, not paints; she wants to be an actress. I wasn't very keen on it; but she's got the material in her, and I concluded I'd no right to say 'no.' Still, she's not very strong—takes after her mother, I'm afraid, a little; I'd rather she'd had a gift for something else."

"Was it necessary for her to have a gift at all?" asked Heriot, a shade sarcastically. "Couldn't she stop at home?"

"Well," said Cheriton, "she tried it, but it's a hard thing for a girl like Mamie to content herself with the life in Duluth. There isn't much art in that, Heriot; there isn't much anything. There's the lake, and Superior Street, and the storekeepers lounging in the doorways and spitting on the wooden sidewalks. And there's a theatre of a sort—which made her worse. For a girl panting to be famous, Duluth is a hell. She's been breaking her heart in it ever since she was sixteen; and after all, it's in the blood. It would have been odd if my daughter *hadn't* had the artistic temperament, I suppose!"

"I suppose it would," said Heriot. "Well, why doesn't she go on the stage in America? I shouldn't think she'd find it easy here."

"She wouldn't find it easy there. There's no stock company in Duluth; only the travelling companies come sometimes for a few nights. There's no bigger opportunity for her on the other side than on this. Besides, she wants the English stage. I wonder if you know anybody who could give her any introductions?"

"I? Not a soul!"

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," said Cheriton blankly; "I was counting on you some."

Heriot looked at him.

"You counted on *me?* For Heaven's sake, why?"

"Well, I don't know many people over here to-day, you see; the fellows I used to knock against have died, gone to the Colonies—fizzled out. You were solid; and you were a swell, with connections and all that. I understand the stage has become very fashionable in London—I thought you might meet actor-managers at dinners and things. That was the idea; I daresay it was very stupid, but I had it. I mentioned your name to Mamie as soon as it was settled we should come. However, we'll fix the matter somehow."

"I'm sorry to prove a disappointment," said Heriot. "Tell your daughter so for me. I'd do what you want with pleasure, if I were able. You know that, I'm sure?"

"Oh, I know that," said Cheriton; "it can't be helped. Yes, I'll tell her. She *will* be disappointed, of course; she understands how difficult the thing is without influence, and I've talked about you a lot."

"Do you think you were wise to—to——"

"Oh, it was a mistake as it turns out!"

"I don't mean that only. I mean, do you think you were wise to encourage her hopes in such a direction at all? Frankly, if *I* had a daughter—— Forgive me for speaking plainly."

"My dear fellow! your daughter and mine! —their paths would be as wide apart as the poles. And you don't know Mamie!"

"At all events I know that the stage is more overcrowded every year. Most girls are stage-struck at some time or other; and there are hundreds of actresses who can't earn bread-and-cheese. A man I know has his type-writing done by a woman who used to be on the stage. She played the best parts in the country, I believe, and, I daresay, nursed the expectation of becoming a Bernhardt. She gets a pound a week in his office, he tells me, and was thankful to obtain the post."

"Mamie is bound to come to the front. She's got it—she's an artist born. I tell you, I should be brutal to stand in the way of her career; the girl is pining, really pining, for distinction! When you've talked to her you'll change your views."

"Perhaps," said Heriot, as the shortest way of ending the discussion; "very likely I'm wrong." The budding genius bored him. "Mind you explain to the young lady that my inability, and not my will, refuses, at any rate."

"That's all right," declared Cheriton, getting up. "I told her I was coming round to see if it was you." He laughed. "I bet she's picturing me coming back with a bushel of letters of introduction from you by now! Well, I must be going; it's getting late."

"You brought her down to Eastbourne to-day?"

"Oh, I've been dangling about town a little by myself; Mamie and my sister have been here a week. Good-night, old chap; shall I see you to-morrow? You might give us a look in if you will—say in the afternoon. Belle Vue Mansion; don't forget!"

"Where?" exclaimed Heriot, startled into interest.

"Belle Vue Mansion," repeated Cheriton, gripping his hand. "You can't miss it: a big pink house on the Esplanade."

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER II

Heriot betook himself there on the following day with a curious eagerness. If the girl he had noticed should prove to be Cheriton's daughter, how odd it would be! He at once hoped for the coincidence, and found the possibility a shade pathetic. It emphasised his years to think that the ill-kept child of the dirty studio might have become the girl he had admired. His progress during the interval appeared momentarily insignificant to him; he felt that while a brat became a woman he ought to have done much more. He was discouraged to reflect that he had not taken silk; for he had always intended to take silk, and had small misgivings that he would have cause to repent it. His practice had indicated for some time that he would not suffer by the step, and yet he had delayed his application. His motto had been, "Slow and sure," but it seemed to him suddenly that he had been too slow; his income as a Junior should not have contented him so long.

He pulled the bell, and was preceded up the

stairs by a maid-servant, who opened a door, and announced him to the one occupant of the room. Heriot saw that she was the girl of the balcony and the terrace, and that she moved towards him smiling.

"I am Mamie Cheriton," she said. "My father is expecting you."

Her intonation was faintly American, but her voice was full and sweet. He took her hand with pleasure, and a touch of excitement that did not concord with his countenance, which was formal and impassive.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Cheriton."

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "He will be here in a minute."

Heriot took a seat, and decided that her eyes were even lovelier than he had known.

"When I saw you last, you were a child," he remarked inaccurately.

"Yes; it must have astonished you meeting my father again after so many years. It was funny your being here, wasn't it? . . . But perhaps you often come to Eastbourne?"

"No," said Heriot, "no, I don't often come. How does it strike you, Miss Cheriton? I suppose you can hardly remember England, can you?"

"Well, I shan't be sorry to be settled in

London; it was London I was anxious to go to, not the sea-shore. . . . Do you say 'sea-shore' in Europe, or is it wrong? When I said 'sea-shore' this morning, I noticed that a woman stared at me."

"One generally says 'seaside' over here; I don't know that it's important."

"Well, the 'seaside' then. The seaside was my aunt's wish. Well—— Well, I'm saying 'well' too often, I guess?—that's American, too! I've got to be quite English—that's my first step. But at least I don't talk like Americans in your comic papers, do I?"

"You talk very delightfully, I think," he said, taken aback.

"I hope you mean it. My voice is most important, you know. It would be very cruel if I were handicapped by having anything the matter with my voice. I shall have difficulties enough without!"

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I'm unfortunate. I wish I could have done something to further the ambitions your father mentioned."

She smiled again, rather wistfully this time.

"They seem very absurd to you, I dare-say?"

He murmured deprecation: "Why?"

"The stage-struck girl is always absurd."

Recognising his own phrase, he perceived

that he had been too faithfully reported, and was embarrassed.

"I spoke hastily. In the abstract the stage-struck girl may be absurd, but so is a premature opinion."

"Thank you," she said. "But why 'stage-struck,' anyhow? it's a term I hate. I suppose you wanted to be a barrister, Mr. Heriot?"

"I did," he confessed, "certainly. There are a great many, but I thought there was room for one more."

"But you weren't described as 'bar-struck'?"

"I don't think I ever heard the expression."

"It would be a very foolish one?"

"It would sound so to me."

"Why 'stage-struck' then? Is it any more ridiculous to aspire to one profession than another? You don't say a person is 'paint-struck,' or 'ink-struck,' or anything else '-struck'; why the sneer when one is drawn towards the theatre? But perhaps *no* form of art appears to you necessary?"

"I think I should prefer to call it 'desirable,' since you ask the question," he said. "And 'art' is a word used to weight a great many trivialities too! Everybody who writes a novel is an artist in his own estimation, and personally, I find existence quite possible without novels."

"Did you ever read *Mademoiselle de Maupin?*" asked Miss Cheriton.

"Have *you?*" he said quickly.

"Oh yes; books are very cheap in America. 'I would rather grow roses than potatoes,' is one of the lines in the preface. *You* would rather grow potatoes than roses, eh?"

"You are an enthusiast," said Heriot; "I see!" He pitied her for being Dick Cheriton's daughter. She was inevitable: the pseudo-artist's discontent with realities—the inherited tendencies, fanned by thinly-veiled approval! He understood.

Cheriton came in after a few minutes, followed by the aunt, to whom Heriot was presented. He found her primitive, and far less educated than her brother. She was very happy to see dear Dick again, and she was sorry that she must lose him again so soon. Dear Mamie, though, would be a consolation. A third-rate suburban villa was stamped upon her; he could imagine her making hideous antimacassars for forbidding armchairs, and that a visit to an Eastbourne boarding-house was the event of her life. She wore jet earrings, and stirred her tea with vast energy. With the circulation of the tea, strangers drifted into the room, and the conversation was continued in undertones.

"Have you been talking to Mamie about her intentions?" Cheriton inquired.

"We've been chatting, yes. What steps do you mean to take, Miss Cheriton? What shall you do?"

"I propose to go to the dramatic agents," she said, "and ask them to hear me recite."

"Dramatic agents must be kept fairly busy, I should say. What if they don't consent?"

"I shall recite to them."

"You are firm!" he laughed.

"I am eager, Mr. Heriot. I have longed till I am sick with longing. London has been my aim since I was a little girl. I have dreamt of it!—I've gone to sleep hoping that I might; I couldn't recall one of its streets, but in dreams I've reached it over and over again. The way was generally across Lincoln Park, in Chicago; and all of a sudden I was among theatres and lights, and it was London!"

"And you were an actress. And the audience showered bouquets!"

"I always woke up before I was an actress. But now I'm here really, I mean to try to wake London up."

"I hope you will," he said. Her faith in herself was a little infectious, since she was beautiful. If she had been plain, he would have considered her conceited.

"Have I gushed?" she said, colouring.

He was not sure but what she had.

"She's like her father," said Cheriton gaily; "get her on the subject of art, and her tongue runs away with her. We're all children, we artists—up in the skies, or down in the dumps. No medium with us! She must recite to *you* one of these days, Heriot; I want you to hear her."

"Will you, Miss Cheriton?"

"If you like," she said.

"Dear Mamie must recite to *me*," murmured Mrs. Baines; "I'm quite looking forward to it. What sort of pieces do you say, dear? Nice pieces?"

"She knows the parts of Juliet, and Rosalind, and Pauline by heart," said Cheriton, ignoring his sister. "I think you'll say her Balcony Scene is almost as fine a rendering as you've ever heard. There's a delicacy, a spiritual——"

"Has she been trained?" asked Heriot; "I understood she was quite a novice."

"I've coached her myself," replied Cheriton complacently. "I don't pretend to be an elocutionist, of course; but I've been able to give her some hints. All the arts are related, you know, my boy—it's only a difference in the form of expression. They're playing *Romeo and Juliet* at the theatre here to-night, and

we're going; she never loses an opportunity for study. It's been said that you can learn as much by watching bad acting as good. Will you come with us?" he added, lowering his voice. "You'll see how she warms up at the sight of the footlights."

"I don't mind," said Heriot, "if I shan't be in the way. Suppose we all dine together at the hotel, and go on from there? What do you say?" He turned to the ladies, and the widow faltered:

"Lor, I'm sure it's very kind of you to invite me, Mr. Heriot. That *would* be gay, wouldn't it!"

She smoothed her flat hair tremulously, and left the decision to her brother and her niece.

Heriot took his leave with the understanding that he was to expect them, and sauntered along the Parade more cheerfully than was his wont. The girl had not failed to impress him, though he disapproved of her tendencies; nor did these appear quite so preposterous to him now, albeit he thought them regrettable. He did not know whether he believed in her or not yet, but he was conscious that he wished to do so. His paramount reflection was that she would have been a wholly charming girl if she had had ordinary advantages—a finishing governess, and a London season, and a touch of conven-

tionality. He disliked to use the word "conventionality," for it sounded priggish; but "conventionality" was what he meant.

At dinner, however, and more especially after it, he forgot his objections. In the theatre he watched Miss Cheriton more attentively than the stage. She herself sat with her eyes riveted on it, and he could see that she was the prey to strong excitement. He wondered whether this was created by the performance, which seemed to him indifferent, or by the thoughts that it awoke, and he resolved to ask her. When the curtain fell, and they went out, he wasn't sorry that Cheriton derided his suggestion of a cab and declared that the walk back would be agreeable. He kept by the girl's side, and the others followed.

She did not speak, and after a minute he said:

"Will it jar upon you if I say, 'Let us talk'?"

She turned to him with a slight start.

"Of course not! How can you think me so ridiculous?"

"Yet it did!" said Heriot; "I could see."

"I know exactly how I appear," she said constrainedly. "I look an affected idiot. If you knew how I hate to appear affected! I give you my word I don't put it on; I can't

help it. The theatre gives me hot and cold shivers, and turns me inside out. That isn't prettily expressed, but it describes what I mean as nearly as possible. Am I 'enthusing' again?"

"I never said you 'enthused' before. You're not my idea of—of 'the gushing girl' at all."

"I'm glad to hear it. I was very ashamed when you had gone this afternoon." She hesitated painfully. "I wish I could explain myself, but I can't—without a pen. I can write what I feel much better than I can say it. I began to write a play once, and the girl said just what I felt. It was a bad play, but a big relief. I've sometimes thought that if I walked about with a pen in my hand, I should be a good conversationalist."

"Try to tell me what you feel without one," said Heriot.

"You encourage me to bore you. Mr. Heriot, I yearn, I crave, to do something clever. It isn't only vanity: half the craving is born of the desire to live among clever people. Ever since I can remember I've ached to know artists, and actors, and people who write, and do things. I've been cooped among store-keepers without an idea in their heads; I've never seen a man or woman of talent in my

life, excepting my father; I've never heard anybody speak who knew what art or ambition meant. You may laugh, but if I had it, I would give five hundred dollars to go home with some of those actresses to-night, and sit mum in a corner and listen to them."

"Don't you think it very likely you might be disappointed?" he asked.

"I don't. I don't expect they would talk blank-verse at supper, but they would talk of their work, of their hopes. An artist must be an artist always—on the stage, or off it; in his studio, or in his club. My father is an instance: he could not be a philistine if he tried. He once said something I've always remembered; he said: 'God gave me my soul, child; circumstances gave me an hotel.' I thought it happily put."

Heriot perceived that Cheriton had thought so too, as the "impromptu" had been repeated.

"What a different world we should have lived in by now if he had kept in his profession!" she exclaimed. "I quiver when I realise what I've missed. People that I only know through their books, or the newspapers, would have been familiar friends. I should have seen Swinburne smoking cigars in our parlour; and Sarah Bernhardt would have dropped in to

tea and chatted about the rehearsal she had just left, and showed me the patterns of the new costumes she was ordering. Isn't it wonderful? "

In sympathy for her he said :

" It's possible your father might have remained in England without becoming intimate with celebrities."

She looked doubtful. " Even if he hadn't—and one likes to believe in one's own father—the atmosphere would have been right. They mightn't have been Swinburnes and Bernhardts that were at home in our place—they might have been people the world hasn't heard of yet. But they would have talked of the time when the world was *going* to hear of them. One can respect an obscure genius as much as a famous one."

They had reached the door of Belle Vue Mansion; and when he was begged to go in for half an hour, Heriot did not demur. They had the drawing-room to themselves now, and Cheriton descanted with relish on the qualifications for a successful actress. He had no knowledge of the subject, but possessed great fluency, and he spoke of " broad effects," and " communicable emotion," and " what he might call a matter of perspective " with an authority which came near to disguising the

fact that there was little or no meaning in what he said. The girl sat pale and attentive, and Mrs. Baines listened vaguely, as she might have done to a discourse in Chinese. Relatives who came back from America and invited her to stay with them in a house where she cost two guineas a week, must be treated with deference; but the stage and the circus were of equal significance to her mind, and she would have simpered just as placidly if her niece had been anxious to jump through a hoop. Her chief emotion was pride at being in a room with a barrister who, she had learnt, was the brother of a baronet; and she watched him furtively, with the anticipation of describing the event in Lavender Street, Wandsworth, where the magnate was a gentleman who travelled in a brougham, and haberdashery.

"Would it be inconsiderate to ask you to recite to-night, Miss Cheriton?" inquired Heriot. "Don't, if you are too tired."

She rose at once, as if compelling herself to subdue reluctance, and moved towards the bay of the window slowly. For a second or two after she stood there she did not speak, only her lips trembled. Then she began Portia's speech on mercy. In recitation her voice had the slight tremolo that is natural to many beginners who feel deeply; but its quality was

delicious, and her obvious earnestness was not without effect. Conscious that her gestures were stiff, she had chosen a speech that demanded little action, and it was not until she came to "Therefore, Jew, though justice be thy plea," that her hands, which she had clasped lightly in front of her, fell apart. With the change of position she seemed to acquire a dignity and confidence that made the climax triumphant, and though Heriot could see that she had much to learn, his compliments were sincere.

When he bade her good-night, she looked at him appealingly.

"Tell me the truth," she said under her breath; "I've only had my father's opinion. Tell me the truth!"

"I honestly believe you're clever," he answered. "I'm sure of it." He felt his words to be very cold compared with the sympathy that was stirring in him.

The proprietress, who had entered, hovered about with an eye on the gas, and he repeated his adieux hurriedly. The interest that he already took in the question of Miss Cheriton's success surprised him. The day had had a charm that was new, and he found that he was eagerly anticipating the morrow.

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER III

On the pavements of the Strand the snow had turned to slush; and from the river a fog was blowing up, which got into the girl's throat, and made her cough. She mounted a flight of gloomy stairs, and pulled a bell. Already her bearing had lost something that had distinguished it in the summer : something of courage. She rang the bell deprecatingly, as if ashamed.

The anteroom into which she passed had become painfully familiar to her, like the faces of many of the occupants. They all wore the same expression—an air of repressed eagerness, of diffidence striving to look assured. The walls were covered with theatrical photographs, and in a corner a pimply youth sat writing at a table. What he wrote nobody knew or cared. The crowd had but one thought—the door that communicated with the agent's private office, to which they prayed, though they were no longer sanguine, that they would gain admission. It was four o'clock, and at five the office would close. There were

so many of them that it was impossible for Mr. Passmore to interview everybody. Which of them would be lucky to-day?

Mamie also looked towards the door, and from the door back to her companions in distress. A little fair woman in a light fawn costume—terribly unsuitable to the season, but her least shabby—met her eyes and spoke.

"Have you got an appointment?" she asked in a low voice.

"No."

"Oh, then you won't see him," said the little woman more cheerfully. "I thought, as you'd come in so late, that you had an appointment. *I've* been here since twelve."

The door opened, and Mr. Passmore appeared on the threshold. He did not say "good-afternoon" to his clients; he cast an indifferent gaze round the room, and signed to a cadaverous man who sat sucking the handle of his umbrella.

"Here! *You!*" he said, retiring again. The cadaverous man rose hurriedly, among envious glances, and twenty-five heads that had been lifted in expectation drooped dejectedly. The men whose watches were not pawned looked to see the time.

"What's your line?" said the little woman, addressing Mamie once more.

"I beg your pardon? Oh, I'm trying for my first engagement; I haven't acted yet at all."

The other showed surprise and some contempt.

"A novice, are you! Good Lord, it's no good your coming to the agents, my dear; they can't find shops for *us*."

"I paid Mr. Passmore the usual fee," said Mamie; "he promised he'd do what he could."

The little woman smiled, and turned her shoulder to her, declining further discussion. Another girl rang the bell, but withdrew with a sigh as she perceived the futility of waiting. The cadaverous man came out, with "an engagement" writ large upon his features. He stowed a type-written part into the pocket of his overcoat, and nodded good-bye to an acquaintance, whose cast of countenance proclaimed him a low comedian.

"Got anything, dear boy?" inquired the latter in a husky whisper.

"They want me for the *White Slaves* company—the Father. Offered four. Of course I refused point-blank. 'No,' I said, 'six.' 'Oh,' he said, 'impossible!' I wouldn't budge; what do *you* think! Why, I had eight with Kavanagh, and she's as good as booked me for her next tour. '*I* don't mind,' I said; 'I'll go to the Harcourts!' They've been trying to get me back, and he knows it.

'Don't do that,' he said; 'say five, my boy!' 'Six!' I said, 'and I only take it then to fill in.' 'Well, they want you,' he said; 'you're the only man for the part, and I suppose you've got to have your own terms; but they wouldn't pay it to anybody else.'" His salary was to be three-pounds-ten, and he could have shed tears of relief to get even so much as that.

"Damn fine, old chap!" said the low comedian, who didn't believe him. "Is the comedy part open, do you know? I might——"

"Don't think so; fancy they're complete." His manner was already condescending. "Olive oil!"

"Now, I can't see you people to-day!" exclaimed Mr. Passmore, putting up his hands impatiently. "No good, Miss Forbes," as a girl made a dart towards him with a nervous smile that was meant to be ingratiating; "got nothing for you, it's no use. . . . What do *you* want, my dear?"

Another lady, who found it embarrassing to explain her anxiety in public, faltered "that she had just looked in to hear if Mr. Passmore could kindly——"

"Nothing doing! perhaps later on. I'll let you know."

"You *will* bear me in mind, *won't* you, Mr. Passmore?" she pleaded.

"What?" he said. "Oh yes, yes; I'll drop you a postcard—I won't forget you. Good-day." He did not even recollect her name.

"Can I speak to you, Mr Passmore?" said Mamie, rising.

"You?" he said questioningly. "Oh, I can't do anything for you yet! Everything's made up—things are very quiet just now. . . . Here, Miss Beaumont, I want a word with you."

"Give me a minute," persisted Mamie. "I want an engagement; I don't care how small the part is. I'll be a servant, I'll be anything, I want a beginning! I recited to you, if you remember, and——"

"Did you?" he said. "Oh yes, yes, I remember—very nice. You wanted to play Juliet!" He laughed.

"I'll be *anything!*" she said again. "I'll give you double the commission if——"

"Have you got enough voice for chorus?" he asked testily. "How are your limbs?"

"I want to be an actress," she said, flushing. "I mean to work!"

"Come on, Miss Beaumont!" he cried. And Miss Beaumont swept past her into the sanctum.

The girl who six months ago had looked for-

ward to playing Juliet made her way down the dingy staircase drearily. This was but one of many dramatic agents with whom she had gone through the form of registering her name. Mr. Passmore's booking-fee had been five shillings; the booking-fee of most of the others had been five shillings; one had charged a guinea. All had been affable when she paid her first visit, and forgotten who she was when she paid her second; all had been reminded who she was, and failed to recognise her when she called again. She called on one or another of them every day, and contrived to gain such an interview as she had just had about once a week. She had taken in the theatrical papers and replied to shoals of advertisements, but as she had to state that she was a novice, nobody ever took any notice of her applications. She had haunted the stage-doors when she read that a new piece was to be produced, begging in vain to be allowed to see the manager. She had, in fine, done everything that was possible; and she was as far from securing an engagement as on the day that she arrived in England. And she had talent, and she was beautiful, and was prepared to begin on the lowest rung of the ladder.

The stage is generally supposed to be the easiest of all callings to enter. The girl who

is unhappy at home, the boy who has been plucked for the army, the woman whose husband has failed on the Stock Exchange, all speak of "going on the stage" as calmly as if it were only necessary to take a stroll to get there. As a matter of fact, unless an extraordinary piece of luck befalls her, it is almost as difficult for a girl without influence, or a good deal of money, to become an actress as it is for her to marry a duke. She may be in earnest, but there are thousands who are in earnest; she may be pretty, but there are hundreds of pretty actresses struggling and unrecognised; she may be a genius, but she has no opportunity to display her gift until the engagement is obtained. And this is the tremendous obstacle. She can prove nothing; she can only say, "I feel I should succeed." If she is allowed to recite—and it is very rarely that she is—a recital is little or no test of her qualifications for the stage. She may recite cleverly, and as an actress be very indifferent. She has to beg to be taken on trust, while a myriad women, eager for the vacant part, can cry, "I can refer you to so-and-so; I have experience!" Though other artistic professions may be as hard to rise in, there is probably none other in which it is quite so difficult to make the first steps. If a girl is able to write,

she can sit alone in her bedroom, and demonstrate her capability; if she can paint, her canvases speak for her; if she pants to be a prima donna, she can open her mouth and people hear her sing. The would-be actress, alone among artists, can do nothing to show her fitness for the desired vocation until her self-estimate has been blindly accepted—and she may easily fail to do herself justice then, cast, as she will be, for minor parts entirely foreign to her bent.

To succeed on the stage requires indomitable energy, callousness to rebuffs, tact, luck, talent, and facilities for living six or nine months out of the year without earning a shilling. To get on to the stage requires valuable introductions or considerable means. If a woman has neither, the chances are in favour of her seeking an opening vainly all her life. And as to a young man so situated who seeks it, he is endeavouring to pass through a brick wall.

Mamie descended the dingy staircase, and at the foot she saw the girl who had been addressed as "Miss Forbes." She was standing on the doorstep, gathering up her skirts. It had begun to snow again, and she contemplated the dark, damp street shrinkingly. An impulse seized Mamie to speak as she

passed. From such trifles great things sometimes followed, she remembered. She was at the age when the possibility of the happy accident recurs to the mind constantly —a will-o'-the-wisp that lightens the gloom. The reflection takes marvellous forms, and at twenty-one the famous actor—of the aspirant's imagination—who goes about the world crying, "A genius! you must come to me!" may be met in any omnibus. The famous actor of the aspirant's imagination is like the editor as conceived by the general public: he spends his life in quest of obscure ability.

"If we're going the same way, I can offer you a share of my umbrella," she said.

"Oh, thanks!" said the girl in a slightly surprised voice; "I'm going to Charing Cross."

"And *I'm* going to Victoria, so our road is the same," said Mamie.

A feeling of passionate pleasure suffused her as she moved away by the girl's side through the yellow fog. The roar of the Strand had momentarily the music of her dreams while she yearned in Duluth; the greatness of the city —the London of theatres, art and books—throbbed in her veins. She was walking with an actress!

"Isn't it beastly?" said the girl. "I suppose you've got to train it?"

"Yes; I'm living at Wandsworth. Have *you* far to go?"

"Notting Hill. I take the bus. Passmore hadn't got anything for you, had he?"

Mamie shook her head. "We were both unlucky; but perhaps it doesn't matter so much to you?"

"Doesn't it! . . . Have you been on his books long, Miss——?"

"Miss Cheriton—Mamie Cheriton."

"That's a good name; it sounds like a character in a play—as if she'd have a love-scene under the apple-blossom! Where were you last?"

"At Mr. Faulkner's; but he didn't know of any vacancy either."

"I don't mean that," said Miss Forbes; "I mean, how long have you been out?"

"Oh," answered Mamie, "I left home at one o'clock; that's the worst of living such a long way off!"

The other stared.

"Don't you understand?" she exclaimed. "I mean, what company were you in last, and when did it finish?"

"Oh, I see," stammered Mamie. "I'm sorry to say I've everything in front of me! I've never had a part yet at all. I'm that awful thing—a novice."

"Crumbs!" said Miss Forbes.

"I guess you actresses look down on novices rather?"

"Well, the profession is full enough already, goodness knows! Still, I suppose we've all got a right to begin. I don't mind a novice who goes to the agents in the snow; it shows she means business anyhow. It's the amateurs who go to the managers in hansoms that I hate. But it's an awful struggle, my dear, take my word for it; you'd better stop at home if you can afford to. And Passmore will never be any use to you. Look at *me!* I've been going to him for four months; and I played Prince Arthur on tour with Sullivan when I was nine."

"I *am* looking at you," said Mamie, smiling, "and envying you till I'm ill. You say Passmore is no use: let me into a secret. What *can* I do to get an engagement?"

"Blest if *I* know, if you haven't got any friends to pull the strings! I'd like to know the secret myself. Well," she broke off, "perhaps we shall meet again. I must say 'good-evening' here; there's my bus."

"Don't go yet!" begged Mamie. "Won't you come and have some tea first?"

Miss Forbes hesitated eloquently.

"I shall have tea when I get home," she murmured, "and I'm rather late."

"Oh, let me invite an actress to tea! Do, please! It will be the next best thing to getting a part."

"You're very kind. I don't mind, I'm sure. There's a place close by where they give you a pot for two for fourpence. You're American, aren't you?"

"I've lived in America; I'm English really."

They were soon seated at a table. Mamie ordered a pot of tea, and muffins.

"It's nice and warm in here," she said.

"Isn't it! I noticed you in the office. My name is Mabel Forbes; but I daresay you heard Passmore speak to me?"

"Yes; he didn't speak very nicely, did he?"

"They never do; they're all alike. They know we can't do without them, and they treat us like dirt. I tell you, it's awful; you don't know what you're letting yourself in for, my dear."

"To succeed I'd bear anything, all the snubs and drudgery imaginable. I do know; I know it's not to be avoided. I've read the biographies of so many great actresses. I should think of the future—the reward. I'd set my teeth and *live* for that time; and I'd work for it morning, noon, and night."

"It would do me good to live with you, if we were on tour together," said Miss Forbes

cheerfully; "you'd keep my pecker up, I think. I loathe sharing diggings with another girl, as a rule—one always quarrels with her, and, with the same bedroom, one has nowhere to go and cry. After they've been in the profession a few years they don't talk like you. Not that there's really much in it," she added with a sigh. "To set your teeth, and work morning, noon, and night sounds very fine, but what does it amount to? It means you'd get two-ten a week, and study leading business on the quiet till you thought you were as good as Ellen Terry. But if nobody made you an offer, what then?"

"You mean it's possible to be really clever, and yet not to come to the front?" asked Mamie earnestly.

"How can you come to the front if no one gives you the opportunity? You may be liked where you are—in what you're doing—but you can't play lead in London unless a London manager offers you an engagement to play lead, can you? You can't make him! Do you suppose the only clever actresses alive are those who're known? Besides, if leading business is what you are thinking of, I don't believe you've the physique for it; you don't look strong enough. I should have thought light comedy was more your line."

"It isn't. If I'm meant for anything, it's for drama, and—and tragedy. But I'd begin in the smallest way and be grateful. The ideas I had when I came to London have been knocked out of me—and they were moderate enough, too! I'd begin by saying that the 'dinner was ready.' Surely it can't be so difficult to get an opening like that, if one knows how to set about it?"

"Well, look here, my dear. I played Prince Arthur with Sullivan when I was nine, as I tell you, and I've been in the profession ever since. But I've been out of an engagement for four months now; all I could save out of my last screw has gone in bus fares and stamps—and my people haven't got any more money than they know how to spend. If an engagement to announce the dinner had been offered *me* to-day, I'd have taken it and I'd be going back to Notting Hill happy."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Mamie sympathetically. "Shall we have another muffin?"

"No, I don't want any more, thanks. But you've no idea what a business it is! I've got talent and experience, and I'm not bad-looking, and yet you see how I've got to struggle. One is always too late everywhere. I was at the Queen's this morning. There are always any number of small parts in the Queen's

things, you know, and I thought there might be a chance for *The Pride of the Troop.* They'd got everybody except the extra ladies. By the way, you might try to get on at the Queen's as an extra, if you like. With your appearance you'd have a very good chance, I should say."

Mamie felt her heart stirring feverishly. "Do you mean it?" she asked. "What are 'extras'—you don't mean 'supers'?"

"Oh, they're better than supers—different class, you know. Of course they've nothing to say, except in chorus. They come on in the race-course scene and the ball-room and look nice. They wear swagger frocks—the management finds their dresses—and are supposed to murmur, and laugh, and act in dumb-show in the background. *You* know! They're frightful fools—a girl who *could* act a bit would stand out among extra ladies like a Bernhardt at the Ladbroke Hall."

"If they'd take me," said Mamie, clasping her hands; "if they'd only take me! Do you really think they will?"

"It couldn't hurt to try. Ask for Mr. Casey and tell him you want to 'walk on.' There, I've given you a hint, after all!" she exclaimed, as she got up; "one can't think of everything right off. It might prove a

start for you; who knows? If Casey sees you're intelligent, he may give you a line or two to speak. You go up to one of the principals, and say, 'Lord Tomnoddy, where's that bracelet you promised to send me when I saw you at Kempton Park?' Then the low-comedy merchant—it's generally the low-comedy merchant you speak to—says something that gets a laugh, and bustles up the stage, and you run after him angrily. But don't be sanguine, even of getting on as an extra! There's always a crowd of women besieging the Queen's at every production—you won't be the only pretty one. Well, I must be going, my dear. I wish you luck."

"And luck to *you!*" said Mamie, squeezing her hand gratefully; "and many, many thanks. I look forward to telling you the result. I suppose we're sure to see each other at Mr. Passmore's?"

"Oh, we're bound to run against each other somewhere before long," returned Miss Forbes cordially. "Yes, I shall be curious to hear what you do; I've enjoyed our chat very much. Take care of yourself!"

She hurried towards her bus, waving au revoir, and Mamie crossed the road. London widened between the girls—and their paths in it never met again.

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER IV

As she reached the opposite pavement Heriot exclaimed : " Miss Cheriton ! Are you going to cut me ? "

" You ? " she cried with surprise. " It was —it was the fog's fault; I didn't see. What a stranger you are ! it's a fortnight since you came out to us. A ' fortnight,' you observe —I'm ' quite English, you know,' now."

" You're in good spirits," he said. " What have you being doing ? "

" I've been rising in my career," she answered gaily; " I have had tea in a cakeshop with an actress. I have just shaken hands with her; she has just given me a piece of advice. I am, in imagination, already a personage."

" Who is she ? " asked Heriot. " Where does she come from ? . . . Let me see you to Victoria; I suppose that's where you are going ? "

He stopped a hansom, and scrutinised her sadly as they took their seats. " Have you been out in this weather long ? " he said.

"You poor child, how wet you must be! Well, you know an actress. Aren't you going to tell me all about it?"

She was as voluble as he wished; he had become in the last few months her confidant and consoler. Lavender Street, Wandsworth, or those residents who commanded a view of No. 20, had learnt to know his figure well. Awhile ago he had marvelled at the rôle he was filling; latterly he had ceased to marvel. He realised the explanation—and as he listened to her tale her words smote him. It hurt him to think of the girl beside him cringing to a theatrical agent, forming a chance acquaintance in the streets, and contemplating so ignoble a position as the one of which she spoke. He looked at her yearningly.

"You are not pleased," she said.

"Is there a great deal to be pleased at? Is this sort of thing worthy of you?"

"It is the first step. Oh, be nice about it, do! If you understood . . . can I be Juliet at once! If I'm to succeed——"

"I have sympathised with you," he said; "I've entered into your feelings; I do understand. But you don't know what you're meditating. Admitting it's inevitable—admitting, if you're to be an actress, that you must begin, since you've no influence, where

you're content to begin—can you bear it? These women you'll be thrown amongst——"

"Some, at least," she said, "will be like myself, surely? I am not the only girl who has to begin. And . . . Whatever they are, it can't be helped! Remember, I'm in earnest! I talked at first wildly; I see how childish I was. What should I be if I faltered because the path isn't strewn with roses? An actress must be satisfied to work."

"It isn't decreed that you need be an actress," answered Heriot. "After all, there is no necessity to fight for your bread-and-butter. If you were compelled——"

"There are more compelling forces than poverty. Can't you recognise ambition?"

"Haven't I?" he said. "Have I been wood?"

"Ah," she smiled, "forgive me. I didn't mean that. But be nice still. Am I to reject a career because I'm not starving? I'm starving with my soul. I'm like a poor mute battling for voice. I want—I want to give expression to what I feel within me." She beat her hands in her lap. "I'm willing to struggle—eager to! You've always known it. Why do you disappoint me now? I have to begin even lower than I understood, that's all. And what is it? I shall be surrounded

by artists then. By degrees I shall rise. 'You are in the right way, but remember what I say, Study, study, study! Study well, and God bless you!' Do you know who said that?—Mrs. Siddons to Macready. It was at Newcastle, and it was about her performance the same night that he wrote: 'The violence of her emotion seemed beyond her power longer to endure, and the words, faintly articulated, "Was he alive?" sent an electric thrill through the audience.' Think what that means; three words! I can't do it, I've tried—oh, how I've tried! For months after I read that book, I used to say them dozens of times every day, with every intonation I could think of. But there was no effect, no thrill even to myself. 'Study, study, study! Keep your mind on your art, do not remit your study, and you are certain to succeed!' I *will* keep my mind on it, I'll obey her advice, I *will* succeed. Heaven couldn't be so cruel as to let me fail after putting such longings into me."

Heriot sighed. The impulse to tell her that he loved her, to keep her to himself, was mastering him. Never before had her hold on him been displayed so vividly, nor had the temptation to throw prudence to the winds been quite so strong.

"If you had a happier home," he said, "there would be other influences. Don't think me impertinent, but it can't be very lively for you in that house."

"It isn't a whirl of gaiety, and Aunt Lydia is not ideal. But—but I was just the same in Duluth."

"Duluth!" he echoed; "it was dreary in Duluth, too."

"At all events I had my father there."

"What does he write?" asked Heriot. "Have you had a letter since I saw you?"

"He gives no news. The news is to come from *me*."

"I think there's a little," he said; "I can tell it by your tone."

"It's cheerful to be with someone who *can* tell things by one's tone. Well, he thinks, if I can't make a beginning, that I may as well go back."

"I see," he said. "I won't ask you if you mean to."

She laughed a shade defiantly. "Duluth has many charms — I've been remembering them since his letter. There is my father, and there's strawberry-shortcake. My father will be disappointed in me if I have to go; the strawberry-shortcake—well, there's a tiny shop there where they sell it hot. I've never seen

it hot anywhere else—and they turn on the cream with a tap, out of a thing that looks like a miniature cistern."

"You're not going back," he said. "You're going on the stage as a supernumerary instead?"

In the flare of the station lamps her eyes flashed at him; he could see the passionate trembling of her mouth. The cab stopped, and they got out, and threaded their way among the crowd to the barriers. There was a train in ten minutes, Heriot learnt.

"Shall we go to the waiting-room?"

"No," said Miss Cheriton.

"Forgive me what I said just now. I am sorry."

"What does it matter?"

"It was brutal."

"Rather, perhaps. It was unexpected. You have failed me when I wanted you most."

He took two first-class tickets—he wished to be alone with her, and he knew that she travelled "second."

"I'm coming with you," he said.

"But you can't have dined? Our suppers are not extensive."

"Let us get in!" he answered.

They had the compartment to themselves when the door banged, and he regarded her silently, with nerves that had escaped control.

"I have warned you," she said. "It will be something out of a tin for certain, with vinegar over it."

"Mamie!"

There was rebuke in her expression.

"Mamie," he repeated, "I love you. Why I dislike your going on the stage is because I want you myself. I was 'brutal' because I'm fond of you. Will you marry me?"

She lay back against the darkness of the cushions, pale and startled.

"Are you serious?" she said. "You—want to marry me? do you mean it?"

"I mean it. I don't seem able to tell you how much I mean it. Can you like me well enough to be my wife?"

"I do like you," she stammered; "but I hadn't an idea. . . . I never thought you thought—— Oh, I'm sorry!"

"Why? Why can't you say 'yes'?"

"To marry you?"

"I'll be very gentle to you," he said shakily. "I—for God's sake, don't judge my love for you by the way I put it! I haven't had much practice in love-making; it's a pity, perhaps. There's a word that says it all—I 'worship' you. My darling, what have you to look forward to? You've seen, you've tried, you know what an uphill life it will be. It's not

as if I begged you to waive your hopes while you had encouragement to hope—you've made the attempt, and you know the difficulties now. Come to me instead. You shall live where you like—you can choose your own quarter. You can have everything you care for—books, pictures, theatres too. Oh, my sweet, come to me, and I'll fulfil every wish! Will you, Mamie?"

"I can't," she said tremulously, "it wouldn't be fair." Her eyes shone at him, and she leant forward with parted lips. "I like you, I like you very much, but I don't—I'm not—— I've never been in love with anyone."

"I'll be grateful for small mercies," said Heriot, with an unhappy laugh.

"And I *could* not do what you ask. If I fail, I fail; but I must persevere. I can't accept failure voluntarily—I can't stretch out my arms to it. I should despise myself if I gave in to-day. Even you——"

"You know better than that!" he said.

"Well, yes," she owned, "perhaps I'm wrong there; to you it would seem a sensible step. But I believe in myself. All my life I've had the thought, and I should be miserable, I should hate myself! I should be like my father—I should be always thinking of the 'might have been.' You'd be good to me, but

you'd know you had been a fool. I'm not a bit the sort of woman you should marry, and you'd repent it."

Heriot took her hand and held it tightly.

"I love you," he said. "Consider your own happiness only. I love you."

"I am quite selfish—I know it wouldn't content me; I'm not pretending to any nobility. But I'm sorry; I may say that? I didn't dream you liked me in this way. I'm not hard, I'm not a horror, and I can see—I can see that I'm a lot to you."

"I'm glad of that," he said simply. "Yes, you're 'a lot to me,' Mamie. If you know it, and you can't care for me enough, there's no more for me to say. Don't worry yourself. It's not unusual for a man to be fond of a woman who doesn't want to marry him."

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER V

She betook herself to the Queen's next morning less buoyantly than she had anticipated. Her meeting with Heriot had depressed her. She retained much of the nature of a child, and laughed or cried very easily. She had met Heriot laughing, and he had been serious and sad. With some petulance she felt that it was very unfortunate for her that he had fallen in love with her, and chosen that particular day to tell her so.

She entered the stage-door with no presentiment of conquest, and inquired of the man in the little recess if Mr. Casey was in the theatre. Stage-door keepers are probably the surliest class in existence. They have much to try them, and they spend their official lives in a violent draught; but if there is a stage-door keeper sweet and sunny in his home, he provides an interesting study for the dramatic authors.

The man took her measure in an instant, saving in one particular—she was prepared to give him a shilling and he did not guess it.

"Mr. Casey's on the stage," he said; "he won't be disturbed now."

"If I waited, do you think I might see him?"

"I couldn't tell you, I'm sure."

He resumed his perusal of a newspaper, and Mamie looked at him through the aperture helplessly. There was the usual knot of loafers about the step—a scene-hand or two in their shirt-sleeves; a girl in her pathetic best dress, also hoping for miracles; a member of the company, who had slipped out from rehearsal to smoke a cigarette.

Cerberus was shown where his estimate had been at fault. He said "Miss" now: "If you write your business on one of these forms, Miss, I'll send it in to Mr. Casey."

He gave her a stump of pencil, and a printed slip, specially designed to scare intruders. She wrote her name, and Mr. Casey's name, and could find no scope for euphemisms regarding the nature of the interview she sought. She added, "To obtain engagement as extra lady," and returned the paper with embarrassment; she was sufficiently unsophisticated in such matters to assume that her motive had not been divined.

"'Ere, Bill!" One of the scene-hands turned. "Take it in to Mr. Casey for this lady."

The man addressed as Bill departed through a second door with a grunt and a bang, and she waited expectantly. The girl in her best dress sneered; she could not afford to dispense shillings, herself, and already her feet ached. The door swung back constantly. At intervals of a few seconds a stream of nondescripts issued from the unknown interior, and Mamie stood watching for the features of her messenger. It was nearly a quarter of an hour before he reappeared.

"Mr. Casey can't see you," he announced.

The stage-door keeper heard the intelligence with absolute indifference; but the girl on the step looked gratified.

"What shall I do?" asked Mamie.

"I can't do no more than send in for you, Miss. It ain't much good your waiting—the call won't be over till three o'clock."

"Could I see him then?"

"He'll come out. If you like to take your chance——"

"I'll come back at three o'clock," she said. It was then eleven.

She turned into the Strand—the Strand that has broken more hearts than Fleet Street. Here a young actor passed her, who was also pacing the inhospitable pavements until the hour in which he hoped to see patience and

importunity bear fruit. He wore a fashionable overcoat, and swung his cane with a gloved hand. Presently he would seek a public-house and lunch on a scone, and a glass of "mild-and-bitter." If he had "bitter," he would be a halfpenny short in his homeward fare to Bow. There a musical comedy actress went by, who had "married a swell." His family had been deeply wounded, and showed their mortification by allowing her to support him. She had had three children; and when he was drunk, which was frequently, he said, "God forbid that they should ever become damned mummers like their mother!" A manager had just told her that "she had lost her figure and wouldn't look the part!" and she was walking back to Islington, where the brokers were in the house. A popular comedian, who had been compelled to listen to three separate tales of distress between Charing Cross and Bedford Street, and had already lent unfortunate acquaintances thirty shillings, paused, and hailed a hansom from motives of economy. It was the typical crowd of the Strand, a crowd of the footlights. The men whose positions had been won were little noticeable, but the gait and costume of the majority—affected Youth, and disheartened Age—indicated their profession to the least

experienced eyes. Because she grew very tired, and not that she had any expectation of hearing good news, Mamie went into Mr. Passmore's office, and sat down.

And she did not hear any. After an hour she went away, and rested next in the anteroom of another of the agents, who repeated that "things were very quiet," and that "he wouldn't forget her." Seven or eight other girls were waiting their turn to be told the same thing. At a quarter to three she went back to the Queen's.

"Is he coming out now?" she said. "Am I too soon?"

"Eh?" said the stage-door keeper.

"You told me he'd be out about three. I was asking for Mr. Casey this morning."

"Oh, were you?" he said. "There's been a good many asking for him since then." He gradually recalled her. "Mr. Casey's gone," he added; "they finished early. He won't be here till to-night."

There was a week in which she went to the stage-door of the Queen's Theatre every day, at all hours, and at last she learnt casually that as many extra ladies as were required for the production had been engaged. There were months during which she persisted in her applications at other stage-doors and hope

flickered within her still. But when September came, and a year had passed since her arrival, the expiring spark had faded into lassitude. She tried no longer. Only sometimes, out of the sickness of her soul, the impulse to write was born, and she picked up a pen.

Then it was definitely decided that she should return to America. It was characteristic of her that she had no sooner dried her eyes after the decision than she was restless to return at once; Duluth was no drearier than Wandsworth. Externally it was even picturesque, with the blue water and the sunshine, and the streets of white houses rising in tiers like a theatre; in Duluth the residents "looked down on one another" literally. The life was appalling, but when all was said, was it more limited than Aunt Lydia? And if, in lieu of acting, she dared aspire to dramatic authorship—the thought stirred her occasionally—she could work as well in Minnesota as in Middlesex. Cheriton had remitted the amount of her passage, and suggested that she should sail in a week or two. She had not received the draft two hours when she went up to town and booked a berth in the next steamer.

When it was done, she posted a note to Heriot, acquainting him with her intention. His visits had not been discontinued, but he

came at much longer intervals latterly, and she could not go without bidding him good-bye.

She sat in the Lavender Street parlour the next evening, wondering if he would come. Almost she hoped that he would not. She had written, and therefore done her duty. To see him would, in the circumstances, humiliate her cruelly, she felt. She remembered how she had talked to him twelve months before—recalled her confidence, her pictures of a future that she was never to know, and her eyes smarted afresh. She had even failed to obtain a hearing. "What a fool, what an idiot I look!" she thought passionately.

Tea was over, but the maid-of-all-work had not removed the things; and when Heriot entered, the large loaf and the numerous knives, which are held indispensable to afternoon tea in Lavender Street, were still on the big round table. The aspect of the room did not strike him any more. He was familiar with it, like the view of the kitchen when the front door had been opened, and the glimpse of clothes-line in the yard beyond.

"May I come in?" he said. "Did you expect me?"

"Lor, it's Mr. Heriot!" said Mrs. Baines. "Fancy!"

She told the servant to take away the teapot,

and to bring in another knife. He wondered vaguely what he was supposed to do with it.

"I thought it likely you'd be here," said Mamie; "won't you sit down?"

"I only had your letter this morning. So you are going away?"

"I am going away. I bow, more or less gracefully, to the inevitable."

"To bow gracefully to the inevitable is strong evidence of the histrionic gift," he said.

"I came, I saw, I was conquered; please don't talk about it. . . . It was only settled yesterday. I sail on Saturday, you know."

"Yes, you wrote me," murmured Heriot. "It's very sudden."

"I'm crazy to do something, if only to confess myself beaten."

"May I offer you a cup o' tea, Mr. Heriot?" asked Mrs. Baines.

She always "offered" cups of tea, and was indebted to neighbours for their "hospitality."

He thanked her.

"You will miss your niece?" he said, declining a place at the table, to which she had moved a chair.

"Yes, I'm sure!" she answered. "I say now it's a pity she didn't go with her father last October. Going in a vessel by herself, oh,

dear! I say I wouldn't have got accustomed to having her with me if she'd gone with her father. Though that's neither here nor there!"

"Yes, I think you may believe you'll be missed, Miss Cheriton," he said.

"I say it's very odd she couldn't be an actress as she wanted," continued Mrs. Baines. "Seems so unfortunate with all the trouble that she took. But lor, my dear, we can't see what lies ahead of us, and perhaps it's all for the best! I say perhaps it's all for the best, Mr. Heriot, eh? Dear Mamie may be meant to do something different—writing, or such like; it's not for us to say."

"Have you been writing again?" asked Heriot, turning to the girl.

"A little," she said bitterly. "My vanity dies hard—and Aunt Lydia has encouraged me."

Heriot looked a reproach; her tone hurt him, though he understood of what it was the outcome.

"I should be glad if you had encouragement," he replied; "I think you need it now."

But it hurt him, also, to discuss her pain in the presence of the intolerable third. He knew that if he remained to supper there would be a preparatory quarter of an hour

in which he was alone with her; and it was for this quarter of an hour that he hungered, conscious that during the opening of the lobster-tin two destinies would be determined.

"That's right, Mr. Heriot," said Mrs. Baines placidly. "I'm glad to hear you say so. That's what I've been telling her. I say she mustn't be disheartened. Why, it's surprising, I'm sure, how much seems to be thought of people who write stories and things nowadays; they seem to make quite a fuss of them, don't they? And I'm certain dear Mamie could write if she put her mind to it. I was reading in the paper, *Tit-Bits*, only last week, that there was a book called *Robert Ellis*, or some such name, that made the author quite talked about. Now, I read the piece out to you, dear, didn't I? A book about religion, it was, by a lady; and I'm sure dear Mamie knows as much about religion as anyone."

"My aunt means *Robert Elsmere*," said Mamie, in a laboured voice. "You may have heard it mentioned?"

"You mustn't expect Mr. Heriot to know much about it," said Mrs. Baines; "Mr. Heriot is so busy a gentleman that very likely he doesn't hear of these things. But I assure you, Mr. Heriot, the story seems to have been read a great deal; and what I say is, if dear

Mamie can't be an actress, why shouldn't she write books, if she wants to do something of the sort? I wonder my brother didn't teach her to paint, with her notions and that—but, not having learnt, I say she ought to write books. That's the thing for her—a nice pen and ink, and her own home."

"I agree with you, Mrs. Baines. If she wants to write, she can do that in her own home."

"Not to compare it with such a profession as yours, Mr. Heriot," she said, "which, of course, is sensible and grave. But girls can't be barristers, and——"

"Will you open the window for me?" exclaimed Mamie; "it's frightfully warm, don't you think so?"

She stood there with her head thrown back, and closed eyes, her foot tapping the floor restlessly.

"Are you wishing you hadn't come?" she asked under her breath.

"Why?"

"One must suffer to be polite here."

"Aren't you a little unjust?" said Heriot deprecatingly.

"You have it for an hour," she muttered; "*I* have had it for twelve months. Have you ever wanted to shriek? *I* wanted to shriek just now, violently!"

"I know you did," he said. "Well, it's nearly over. . . . Are you glad?"

"Yes, and no—I can't say. If——"

"Won't you go on?"

"If I dared hope to do anything else. . . . But I'm not going to talk like that any more! I'm ridiculous enough already."

"To whom are you ridiculous?"

"To my own perception—you!"

"Not to me," he said.

"'Pathetic'? Yes, to you I'm 'pathetic.' You pity me as you might pity a lunatic who imagined she was the Queen of England."

"I think you know," said Heriot diffidently, "that neither the Queen nor a lunatic inspires in me quite the feeling that I have for you."

She changed her position, and spoke at random.

"This street is awfully stupid, isn't it?" she said. "Look at that man going up the steps!"

"Yes, he is very stupid, I daresay. What of it?"

"He's a clerk," she said; "and wheels his babies out on Sunday."

"Mamie!"

"Come and talk to Aunt Lydia again. How rude we are!"

"I want to talk to *you*," he demurred.

"Aren't you going to ask me to stay to supper?"

The suggestion came from the widow almost at the same moment.

"I think we had better have the lamp," she went on. "The days are drawing in fast, Mr. Heriot, aren't they? We shall soon have winter again. Do you like the long evenings, or the long afternoons best? Just about now I always say that I can't bear to think of having to begin lighting up at five or six o'clock —it seems so unnatural; and then, next summer, somehow I feel quite lost, not being able to let down the blinds and light the lamp for tea. Mamie, dear, shut the window, and let down the blinds before I light the lamp— somebody might see in!" She suggested the danger in the same tone in which she might have apprehended a burglary.

Under a glass shade a laggard clock ticked drearily towards the crisis, and Heriot provoked its history by the eagerness with which he looked to see the time. It had been a wedding-present from "poor dear Edward's brother," and only one clockmaker had really understood it. The man had died, and since then——

He listened, praying for the kitchen to engulf her.

When she withdrew at last, with an apology for leaving him, he rose, and went to the girl's side.

"Do you know why I came this afternoon?" he said.

She did know—had known it in the moment that he opened the window for her.

"To say 'good-bye,'" she murmured.

"I came to beg you not to go! Dearest, what do you relinquish by marrying me now? Not the stage—your hope of the stage is over; not your ambition in itself—you can be ambitious as my wife. You lose nothing, and you give—a heaven. Mamie, won't you stay?"

She leant on the mantelpiece without speaking. In the pause, Mrs. Baines' voice reached them distinctly, as she said, "Put the brawn on a smaller dish."

"You are forgetting. There was . . . a reason besides the stage."

"It is you who've forgotten. I told you I would be content. . . . It wouldn't be repugnant to you?"

"To refuse while I thought I had a future, and to say 'yes,' now that—— How can you ask me? It would be an insult to your love."

"I do ask you," he urged; "I implore."

"You implore me to be contemptible. You would have a disappointed woman for your

wife. You deserve something better than that."

"Oh, my God," said Heriot, in a low voice, "if I could only tell you how I ache to take you in my arms—as softly as if you were a child! If I could tell you what it is to me to know that you are passing out of my life and that in two days' time I shall never see you again! . . . Mamie?"

The heavy shuffle of the servant was heard in the passage.

"Mamie?" he repeated desperately. "It will be worse over there."

Her eyes were big with perplexity and doubt.

"Mamie?"

"Are you sure you—sure——"

"I love you; I want you. Only trust me! . . . Mamie?"

"If you're quite sure you wish it," she faltered—"yes!"

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VI

When Heriot informed his brother of his approaching marriage, Sir Francis said, "I never offer advice to a man on matters of this sort"; and proceeded to advise. He considered the union undesirable, and used the word.

Heriot replied, "On the contrary, I desire it extremely."

"You're of course the best judge of your own affairs. I'll only say that it is hardly the attachment I should have expected you to form. It appears to me—if I may employ the term—romantic."

"I should say," said Heriot, in his most impassive manner, "that that is what it might be called. Admitting the element of romance, what of it?"

"We are not boys, George," said Sir Francis. He added, "And the lady is twenty-two! The father is an hotel-keeper in the United States, you tell me, and the aunt lives at Wandsworth. Socially, Wandsworth is farther than the United States, but geographically it

is close. This Mrs. Payne—or Baynes—is not a connection you will be proud of, I take it?"

"I shall be very proud of my wife," said Heriot, with some stiffness. "There are more pedigrees than happy marriages."

The Baronet looked at his watch. "As I have said, it's not a matter that I would venture to advise you upon. Of course I congratulate you. We shall see Miss Cheriton at Sandhills, I hope? and—er—Catherine will be delighted to make her acquaintance. I have to meet Phil at the Club. He's got some absurd idea of exchanging—wants to go out to India, and see active service. And I got him into the Guards! Boys are damned ungrateful. . . . When do you marry?"

"Very shortly — during the vacation. There'll be no fuss."

Sir Francis told his wife that it was very "lamentable," and Lady Heriot preferred to describe it as "disgusting." But in spite of adjectives the ceremony took place.

The honeymoon was brief, and when the bride and bridegroom came back to town, they stayed at an hotel in Victoria Street while they sought a flat. Ultimately they decided upon one in South Kensington, and it was the man's delight to render this as exquisite as taste and money made possible. The furniture for his

study had simply to be transferred from his bachelor quarters, but the other rooms gave scope for a hundred consultations and caprices; and like a lad he enjoyed the moments in which he and Mamie bent their heads together over patterns and designs.

She would have been more than human, and less than lovable, if in those early weeks her disappointment had not been lost sight of; more than a girl if the atmosphere of devotion in which she moved had not persuaded her primarily that she was content. Only after the instatement was effected and the long days while her husband was away were no longer occupied by upholsterers' plans, did the earliest returning stir of recollection come; only as she wandered from the drawing-room to the dining-room and could find no further touches to make, did she first sigh.

A gift of Heriot's—he had chosen it without her knowledge, and it had been delivered as a surprise—was a writing-table; a writing-table that was not meant merely to be a costly ornament. And one morning she sat down to it and began another attempt at a play. The occupation served to interest her, and now the days were not so empty. In the evening, as often as he was able, Heriot took her out to a theatre, or a concert, or to houses from which

invitations came. The evenings were enchantingly new to her; less so, perhaps, when they dined at the solemn houses than when a hansom deposited them at the doors of a restaurant and her husband's pocket contained the tickets for a couple of stalls. She was conscious that she owed him more than she could ever repay; and though she had casually informed him that she had begun a drama, she did not discuss the subject with him at any length. To dwell upon those eternal ambitions of hers was to remind him that she had said she would be dissatisfied, and he deserved something different from that; he deserved to forget it, to be told that she had not an ungratified wish! She felt ungrateful to realise that such a statement would be an exaggeration.

In the November following the wedding it was seen that "Her Majesty had been pleased, on the recommendation of the Lord Chancellor, to approve the name of George Langdale Heriot to the rank of Queen's Counsel," and Heriot soon found reason to congratulate himself on his step. A man may earn a large income as a Junior, and find himself in receipt of a very poor one as a Leader. There is an instance cited in the Inns of Court of a stuff-gownsman, making eight thousand a year,

whose income fell, when he took silk, to three hundred. But Heriot's practice did not decline. Few men at the Bar could handle a jury better, or showed greater address in their dealings with the Bench. He knew instinctively the moment when that small concession was advisable, when the attitude of uncompromising rigour would be fatal to his case. He had his tricks in court: the least affected of men out of it, in court he had his tricks. Counsel acquire them inevitably, and one of Heriot's had been a favourite device of Ballantyne's: in cross-examination he looked at the witness scarcely at all, but kept his face turned to the jury-box. Why this should be persuasive is a mystery that no barrister can explain, but its effectiveness is undeniable. Nevertheless, he was essentially "sound." As he had been known as "a safe man" while a Junior, so, now that he had taken silk, he was believed in as a Leader. The figures on the briefs swelled enormously; his services were more and more in demand. Then by-and-by there came a criminal case that was discussed day by day throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom—in drawing-rooms and back parlours, in clubs and suburban trains, and Heriot was for the Defence. The Kensington study had held him until dawn

during weeks, for he had to break down medical evidence. And on the last day he spoke for five hours, while the reporters' pens flew, and the prisoner swayed in the dock; and the verdict returned was "Not Guilty."

When he unrobed and left the court, George Heriot walked into the street the man of the hour; and he drove home to Mamie, who kissed him as she might have kissed her father.

He adored his wife, and his wife felt affection for him. But the claims of his profession left her to her own resources; and she had no child.

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VII

When they had been married three years she knew many hours of boredom. She could not disguise from herself that she found the life that she led more and more unsatisfying—that luxury and a devoted husband, who was in court during the day, and often in his study half the night, were not all that she had craved for; that her environment was philistine, depressing, dull!

And she lectured herself and said that the fault was her own, and that it was a very much better environment than her abilities entitled her to. She recited all the moral precepts that a third person might have uttered; and the dissatisfaction remained.

To write plays ceases to be an attractive occupation when they are never produced. She had written several plays by this time, and submitted them, more or less judiciously, to several West End theatres. There had even been an instance of a manager returning a manuscript in response to her fourth applica-

tion for it. But she was no nearer to success, or to an artistic circle.

A career at the Bar is not all causes célèbres, and the details of Heriot's briefs were rarely enthralling to her mind, even when he discussed them with her; and when he came into the drawing-room he did not want to discuss his briefs. He wanted to talk trifles, just as he preferred to see a musical comedy or a farce when they went out. Nor did he press her for particulars of her own pursuits during his absence. She never sighed over him, and as she appeared to be cheerful, he thought she was contented. That such allusions to her literary work as she made were careless, he took to mean that she had gradually acquired staider views. Once he perceived that it was perhaps quieter for her than for most women, for she had no intimate acquaintances; but then she had never been used to any! There were her books, and her music, and her shopping—no, he did not think she could be bored. Besides, her manner at dinner was always direct evidence to the contrary!

She was now twenty-five years old, and the Kensington flat, and abundant means had lost their novelty. She was never moved by a clever novel without detesting her own obscurity; never looked at the window of the

Stereoscopic Company without a passion of envy for the successful artists; never accompanied Heriot to the solemn houses without yearning for a passport to Upper Bohemia instead. She was twenty-five years old, and marriage, without having fulfilled the demands of her temperament, had developed her sensibilities. It was at this period that she met Lucas Field.

If her existence had been a story, nothing could have surprised her less than such a meeting. It would have been at this juncture precisely that she looked for the arrival of an artist, and Lucas Field would probably have been a brilliant young man who wore his hair long and wrote decadent verse. The trite in fiction is often very astonishing in one's own life, however, and, as a matter of fact, she found their introduction an event, and foresaw nothing at all.

Lucas Field was naturally well known to her by reputation—so well known that when the hostess brought "Mr. Field" across to her, Mamie never dreamed of identifying him with the dramatist. She had long since ceased to expect to meet anybody congenial at these parties, and the fish had been reached before she discovered who it really was who had taken her down.

Field was finding it a trifle dreary himself. He had not been bred in the vicinity of the footlights—his father had been a physician, and his mother the daughter of a Lincolnshire parson—but he had drifted into dramatic literature when he came down from Oxford, and the atmosphere of the artistic world had become essential to him by now. Portman Square, though he admitted its desirability, and would have been mortified if it had been denied to him, invariably oppressed him a shade when he entered it. He was at the present time foretasting hell in the fruitless endeavour to devise a scenario for his next play, and he had looked at Mamie with a little interest as he was conducted across the drawing-room. A beautiful woman has always an air of suggestion; she is a beginning, a "heroine" without a plot. Regarded from the easel she is all-sufficing—contemplated from the desk, she is illusive. After you have admired the tendrils of hair at the nape of her neck, you realise with despondence that she takes you no farther than if she had been plain.

Field had realised that she left him in the lurch before his soup plate had been removed. Presently he inquired if she was fond of the theatre.

"Please don't say 'yes' from politeness," he added.

"Why should I?"

She had gathered the reason in the next moment, and her eyes lit with eagerness. He had a momentary terror that she was going to be commonplace.

"I couldn't dream that it was you—here!" she said apologetically.

"Isn't a poor playwright respectable?" he asked.

There was an instant in which she felt that on her answer depended the justification of her soul. She said afterwards that she could have "fallen round an epigram's neck."

"I should think the poor playwright must be very dull," she replied.

This was adequate, however, and better than his own response, which was of necessity conventional.

"I have seen your new comedy," she continued.

"I hope it pleased you?"

"I admired it immensely—like everyone else. It is a great success, isn't it?"

"The theatre is very full every night," he said deprecatingly.

"Then it *is* a success!"

"Does that follow?"

"You are not satisfied with it — it falls short of what you meant? I shouldn't have supposed that; it seemed to me entirely clear!"

"That I had a theory? Really? Perhaps I have not failed so badly as I thought." He did not think he had failed at all, but this sort of thing was his innocent weakness.

"Miss Millington is almost perfect as 'Daisy,' isn't she?"

"'Almost'? Where do you find her weak?"

She blushed.

"She struck me—of course I am no authority—as not quite fulfilling your idea in the first act—when she accepted the Captain. I thought perhaps she was too responsible there—too grown up."

"There isn't a woman in London who could play 'Daisy,'" said Field savagely. "In other words, you think she wrecked the piece?"

"Oh no, indeed!"

"If 'Daisy' isn't a child when she marries, the play has no meaning, no sense. That is why the character was so difficult to cast—in the first act she must be a school-girl, and in the others an emotional woman."

"Perhaps I said too much."

"You are a critic, Mrs. Heriot."

"Oh, merely——"

"Merely?"

"Merely very much interested in the stage."

"To be interested in the stage is very ordinary; to be a judge of it is rather rare. No, you didn't say too much: Miss Millington *doesn't* fulfil my idea when she accepts 'Captain Arminger.' And to be frank, *I* haven't fulfilled Miss Millington's idea of a consistent part."

"I can understand," said Mamie, "that the great drawback to writing for the stage is that one depends so largely on one's interpreters. A novelist succeeds or fails by himself, but a dramatist——"

"A dramatist is the most miserable of created beings," said Field, "if he happens to be an artist."

"I can hardly credit that. I can't credit anybody being miserable who is an artist." (He laughed. It was not polite, but he couldn't help it.) "Though I can understand his having moods of the most frightful depression!" she added.

"Oh, you can understand that?"

"Quite. Would he be an artist if he didn't have them!"

"May I ask if you write yourself?"

"N—no," she murmured.

"Does that mean 'yes'?"

"It means 'only for my own amusement.'"

"The writer who only writes for his own amusement is mythical, I'm afraid," said Field. "One often hears of him, but he doesn't bear investigation. You don't write plays?"

"No—I try to!"

He regarded her a little cynically.

"I thought ladies generally wrote novels?"

"I wish to be original, you see."

"Do you send them anywhere?"

"Oh, yes; I *send* them; I suppose I always shall!"

"You're really in earnest then? You're not discouraged?"

"I'm earnest, and discouraged, too. . . . Is it impertinent to ask if *you* had experiences like mine when you were younger?"

"I wrote plays for ten years before I passed through a stage-door—one must expect to work for years before one is produced. . . . Of course, one may work all one's life, and not be produced then!"

"It depends how clever one is, or whether one is clever at all?"

"It depends on a good many things. It depends sometimes on advice."

If she had been less lovely, he would not have said this, and he knew it; if she had not

been Mrs. Heriot, he would not have said it either. The average woman who "wants a literary man's advice" is the bane of his existence, and Field was, not only without sympathy for the tyro as a rule—he was inclined to disparage the majority of his colleagues. He was clever, and was aware of it; he occupied a prominent position. He had arrived at the point when he could dare to be psychological. "It depends sometimes on advice," he said. And the wife of George Heriot, Q.C., murmured: "Unfortunately, I have nobody to advise me!"

Even as it was, he regretted it when he took his leave; and the manuscript that he had offered to read lay in his study for three weeks before he opened it. He picked it up one night, remembering that the writer had been very beautiful. The reading inspired him with a desire to see her again. That the play was full of faults goes without saying, but it was unconventional, and there was character in it. He recollected that she had interested him while they talked after dinner on a couch by the piano; and, as her work was promising, he wrote, volunteering to point out in an interview, if she liked, those errors in technique which it would take too long to explain by letter. It cannot be made too clear that if she

had sent him a work of genius and had been plain Miss Smith in a home-made blouse, he would have done nothing of the sort. He called upon her with no idea that his hints would make a dramatist of her, nor did he care in the slightest degree whether they did, or did not. She was a singularly lovely woman, and as her drama had not been stupid—stupidity would have repelled him—he thought a tête-à-tête with her would be agreeable.

To Mamie, however, the afternoon when he sat sipping tea in her drawing-room, like an ordinary mortal, was the day of her life. She told him that she had once hoped to be an actress, and believed that the avowal would advance her in his esteem. He answered that he should not be astonished if she had the histrionic gift; and was secretly disenchanted a shade by what he felt to be banal. Then they discussed his own work, and he found her appreciation remarkably intelligent. To talk about himself to a woman, who listened with exquisite eyes fixed upon his face, was very gratifying to him. Field had rarely spent a pleasanter hour. It is not intimated that he was a vain puppy—he was not a puppy at all. He had half unconsciously felt the want of a sympathetic confidant for a long while, though, and albeit he did not instantaneously

realise that Mrs. Heriot supplied the void, he walked back to his chambers with exhilaration.

He realised it by degrees. He had never married. He had avoided matrimony till he was thirty because he could not afford it; and during the last decade he had escaped it because he had not met a woman whom he desired sufficiently to pay such a price. When he had seen Mamie several times—and in the circumstances it was not difficult to invent reasons for seeing her—he wondered whether he would have proposed to her if she had been single.

Heriot was very pleased to have him dine with them; and he was not ignorant that during the next few months Field often dropped in about five o'clock. Mamie concealed nothing—knowingly—and the subject of her writing was revived now. She told George that Mr. Field thought she had ability. She repeated his criticisms; frankly admired his talent; confessed that she was proud to have him on her visiting list—and fell in love with him without either analysing her feelings, or perceiving her risk.

And while Mrs. Heriot fell in love with him, Lucas Field was not blind. He saw a great deal more than she saw herself—he saw, not only the influence he exercised over her, but that she had moped before he appeared. He did

not misread her; he was conscious that she would never take a lover from caprice—that she was the last woman in the world to sin lightly, or under the rose. He saw that, if he yielded to the temptation that had begun to assail him, he must be prepared to ask her to live with him openly. But he asked himself whether it was impossible that he could prevail on her to do that, had he the mind to do so—whether she was so impregnable as she believed.

He was by this time fascinated by her. His happiest afternoons were spent in South Kensington, advancing his theories, and talking of his latest scenes; nor was it a lie when he averred that she assisted him. To be an artist it is not necessary to be able to produce, and if her own attempts had been infinitely more futile than they were, she might still have expressed opinions that were of service to another. Many of her views were impracticable, naturally. Psychological as his tendencies were, he was a dramatist, and he could not snap his fingers at the laws imposed by the footlights, though he might affect to deride them in his confidences. The only dramatist alive was Ibsen, he said; yet he did not model himself on Ibsen, albeit he was delighted when she exclaimed, "How Ibsenish that is!"

Many of her views were impracticable, because she was ignorant about the stage; but many were intensely stimulating. The more he was with her, the less he doubted her worthiness of sinning for his sake. He was so different from the ordinary dramatic author! On the ordinary dramatic author, with no ideas beyond "curtains" and "fees," she would have been thrown away. He did not wish to be associated with a scandal—it would certainly be unpleasant—but she dominated him, there was no disguising the fact. And he would be very good to her; he would marry her. She was adorable!

His meditations had not progressed so far without the girl's eyes being opened to her weakness; and now she hated herself more bitterly than she had hated the tedium of her life. She knew that she loved him. She was wretched when he was not with her, and ashamed when he was there. She wandered about the flat in her solitude, frightened as she realised what an awful thing had come to her. But she was drunk—intoxicated by the force of the guilty love, and by the thought that such a man as Lucas Field could be in love with *her*. She revered him for not having told her of the feelings that she inspired. Her courage was sustained by the belief that he did not

divine her own—that she would succeed in stamping them out without his dreaming of the danger she had run. Yet she was "drunk"; and one afternoon the climax was reached—he implored her to go away with him.

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER VIII

If a woman sins, and the chronicler of her sin desires to excuse the woman, her throes and her struggles, her pangs and her prayers always occupy at least three chapters. If one does not seek to excuse her, the fact of her fall may as well be stated in the fewest possible words. Mamie did struggle—she struggled for a long time—but in the end she was just as guilty as if she hadn't shed a tear. Field's pertinacity and passion wore her resistance out at last. Theirs was to be the ideal union, and of course he cited famous cases where the man and woman designed for each other by Heaven had met only after one of them had blundered. He did not explain why Heaven had permitted the blunders, after being at the pains to design kindred souls for each other's ecstasy; but there are things that even the youngest curate cannot explain. He insisted that she would never regret her step; he declared that, with himself for her husband, she would become celebrated. Art, love, joy, all might be hers at a word. And she spoke it.

When Heriot came in one evening, Mamie was not there, and he wondered what had become of her, for at this hour she was always at home. But he had not a suspicion of evil—he was as far from being prepared for the blow that was in store as if Field had never crossed their path. He had let himself in with his latch-key, and after a quarter of an hour it occurred to him that she might be already in the dining-room. When he entered it, he noted with surprise that the table was laid only for one.

"Where is Mrs. Heriot?" he said to the servant who appeared in response to his ring.

"Mrs. Heriot has gone out of town, sir."

"Out of town!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Heriot left a note for you, sir, to explain. There it is, sir."

Heriot took it from the mantelpiece quickly; but still he had no suspicion—not an inkling of the truth. He tore the envelope open and read, while the maid waited respectfully by the door.

"Your mistress has been called away," he said when he had finished; "illness! She will be gone some time."

His back was to her; he could command his voice, but his face was beyond his control. He felt that if he moved he would reel, perhaps

fall. He stood motionless, with the letter open in his hand.

"Shall I serve dinner, sir?"

"Yes, serve dinner, Odell; I'm quite ready."

When the door closed, it was his opportunity to gain the chair; he walked towards it slowly, like a blind man. The letter that he held had left but one hope possible—the last hope of despair—to keep the matter for awhile from the servants' knowledge. As yet he was not suffering acutely; indeed, in these early moments, the effect of the shock was more physical than mental. There was a trembling through his body, and his head felt queerly light—empty, not his own.

The maid came back, and he forced himself to dine. The first spoonfuls of the soup that he took were but heat, entirely tasteless, to his mouth, and at the pit of his stomach a sensation of sickness rose and writhed like something living. When she retired once more, his head fell forward on his arms; it was a relief to rest it so. He did not know how he could support the long strain of her vigilance.

By degrees his stupor began to pass, as he stared at the vacant place where his wife should have sat; the dazed brain rallied to comprehension. His wife was not there because she was with her lover! Oh, God! with

her "lover"—Mamie had given herself to another man! *Mamie!* Mamie had gone to another man. His face was grey and distorted now, and the glass that he was lifting snapped at the stem. She had gone. She was no longer his wife. She was guilty, shameless, defiled—Mamie!

He rose, an older, a less vigorous, figure.

"I shall be busy to-night," he muttered; "don't let me be disturbed."

He went to his study, and dropped upon the seat before his desk. Her photograph confronted him, and he took it down and held it shakenly. How young she looked! was there ever a face more pure? And Heaven knew that he had loved her as dearly only an hour ago as on the day that they were married! Not a whim of hers had been refused; not a request could he recollect that he had failed to obey. Yet now she was with a lover! She smiled in the likeness; the eyes that met his own were clear and tender; truth was stamped upon her features. He recalled incidents of the past three years, incidents that had been rich in the intimacy of their life. Surely in those hours she had loved him? That had not been gratitude—a sense of duty merely?—had she not loved him then? He remembered their wedding-day. How pale she had been,

how innocent—a child. Yet now she was with a lover! A sob convulsed him, and he nodded slowly at the likeness through his tears. Presently he put it back; he was angered at his weakness. He had deserved something better at her hands! Pride forbade that he should mourn for her. He had married wildly, yes, he should have listened to advice; Francis had warned him. Perhaps while he wept, they were laughing at him together, she and Field! How did he know that it was Field—had she mentioned his name in the letter? He knew that it was Field instinctively; he marvelled that he had not foreseen the danger, and averted it. How stupid had the petitioners in divorce suits often appeared to him in his time!—he had wondered that men could be so purblind—and he himself had been as dense as any! . . . But she would not laugh. Ah, guilty as she was, she would not laugh—she was not so vile as that! The clock in the room struck one. He heard it half unconsciously—then started, and threw out his arms with a hoarse cry. He sprang to his feet, fired with the tortures of the damned. The sweat burst out on him, and the veins in his forehead swelled like cords. He was a temperate man, at once by taste and by necessity, but now he walked to where the brandy was kept and drank a wine-

glassful in gulps. "Mamie!" he groaned again; "Mamie!" The brandy did not blot the picture from his brain; and he refilled the glass. . . . Nothing would efface the picture.

He knew that it was hopeless to attempt to sleep, yet he went to the bedroom. The ivory brushes were gone from the toilet-table—she had been able to think of brushes! In the wardrobe the frocks were fewer, and the linen was less; the jewellery that he had given to her had been left behind. All was orderly. There were no traces of a hurried departure; the room had its usual aspect. He looked at the pillows. Against the one that had been hers lay the bag of silk and lace that contained her night-dress. Had she forgotten it; or was it that she had been incapable of transferring that? He picked it up, and dropped it out of sight in one of the drawers.

He did not go to bed; he spent the night in an armchair, re-reading the letter, and thinking. When the servant knocked at the door, he went to his dressing-room, and shaved. He had a bath, and breakfasted, and strolled to the station. Outwardly he had recovered from the blow, and his clerk who gave him his list of appointments remarked nothing abnormal about him. In court, Heriot remembered that Mamie and he were to have dined in Holland

Park that evening, and during the luncheon adjournment he sent a telegram of excuse. If anyone had known what had happened to him, he would have been thought devoid of feeling.

He had scarcely re-entered the flat when Mrs. Baines called. His first impulse was to decline to see her; but he told the maid to show her in.

A glance assured him that she was ignorant of what had occurred.

"Dear Mamie is away, the servant tells me," she said, simpering. "I hadn't seen her for such a long time that I thought I'd look in to-day. Not that I should have been so late, but I missed my train! I meant to come in and have a cup of tea with her at five o'clock. Well, I *am* unfortunate! And how have you been keeping, Mr. Heriot?"

"I'm glad to see you. I hope you are well, Mrs. Baines."

"Where has dear Mamie gone?" she asked. "Pleasuring?"

"She is on the Continent, I believe. May I tell them to bring you some tea now?"

"On the Continent alone?" exclaimed Mrs. Baines. "Fancy!"

"No, she is not alone," said Heriot. "You must prepare yourself for a shock, Mrs. Baines. Your niece has left me."

She looked at him puzzled. His tone was so composed that it seemed to destroy the significance of his words.

"Left you? How do you mean?"

"She has gone with her lover."

"Oh, my Gawd!" said Mrs. Baines. . . . "Whatever are you saying, Mr. Heriot? Don't!"

"Your niece is living with another man. She left me yesterday," he continued quietly. "I am sorry to have to tell you such news."

He was sorrier as he observed the effect of it, but he could not soften the shock for her by any outward participation in her grief. Since he must speak at all, he must speak as he did.

"Oh, to hear of such a thing!" she gasped. "Oh, to think that—well—— Oh, Mr. Heriot, I can't . . . it can't be true. Isn't it some mistake? Dear Mamie would never be so wicked, I'm sure she wouldn't! It's some awful mistake, you may depend."

"There's no mistake, Mrs. Baines. My authority is your niece herself. She left a letter to tell me she was going, and why."

The widow moaned feebly.

"With another man?"

He bowed.

"Oh, Heaven will punish her, Mr. Heriot!

Oh, what will her father say—how could she do it! And you—how gentle and kind to her you were *I* could see."

"I did my best to make her happy," he said; "evidently I didn't succeed. Is it necessary for us to talk about it much? Believe me, you have my sympathy, but talking won't improve matters."

"Oh, but I can't look at it so—so calmly, Mr. Heriot! The disgrace! and so sudden. And it isn't for *me* to have *your* sympathy, I'm sure. I say it isn't for *you* to sympathise with *me*. My heart bleeds for you, Mr. Heriot."

"You're very good," he answered; "but I don't know that a faithless wife is much to grieve for after all."

"Ah, but you don't mean that! you were too fond of her to mean it. She'll live to repent it, you may be certain—the Lord will bring it home to her. Oh, how could she do it! You don't—you don't intend to have a divorce?"

"Naturally I intend it. What else do you propose?"

"Oh, I don't know," she quavered, rocking herself to and fro, and smearing the tears down her cheeks with a forefinger in a black silk glove; "but the disgrace! And all Lavender Street to read about it! Ah, you won't

divorce her, Mr. Heriot? It would be so dreadful!"

"Don't you want to see the man marry her?"

"How 'marry her'?" she asked vaguely. "Oh, I understand! Yes, I suppose he *could* marry her then, couldn't he? I'm not a lawyer like you—I didn't look so far ahead. But I don't want a divorce."

"Ah, well, *I* want it," he said; "for my own sake."

"Then you don't love her any more, Mr. Heriot?"

He laughed drearily.

"Your niece has ended her life with me of her own accord. I've nothing more to do with her."

"Those are cruel words," said Mrs. Baines; "those are cruel words about a girl who was your lawful wife—the flesh of your bone in the sight of Gawd and man. You're harder than I thought, Mr. Heriot; you don't take it quite as I'd have supposed you'd take it. . . . So quiet and stern like! I think if you'd loved her tenderly, you'd have talked more heart-broken, though it's not for me to judge."

Heriot rose.

"I can't discuss my sentiments with you, Mrs. Baines. Think, if you like, that I didn't

care for her at all. At least my duty to her is over; and I have a duty to myself to-day."

"To cast her off?" The semi-educated classes use the phrases of novelettes habitually. Whether this is the reason the novelettes trade in the phrases, or whether the semi-educated acquire the phrases from the novelettes, is not clear.

"To——" He paused. He could not trust himself to speak at that moment.

"To cast her off?" repeated Mrs. Baines. "Oh, I don't make excuses for her—I don't pity her. Though she is my brother's child, I say she is deserving of whatever befalls her. I remember well that when Dick married I warned him against it; I said, 'She isn't the wife for you!' It's the mother's blood coming out in her, though my brother's child. But . . . What was I going to say? I'm that upset that—— Oh yes! I make no excuses for her, but I would have liked to see more sorrow on your part, Mr. Heriot; I could have pitied you more if you'd taken it more to heart. You may think me too bold, but it was ever my way to say what was in my mind. I don't think I'll stop any longer. The way you may take it is between you and your Gawd, but——" She put out her hand. "I don't think I'll stop."

"Good-evening," he said stonily. "I'm sorry you can't stay and dine."

She remembered on the stairs that she had not inquired who the man was; but she was too much disgusted by Heriot's manner to go back.

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER IX

When a naturally pure woman, who is not sustained by any emancipated views, consents to live with a man in defiance of social prejudices, she probably obtains as clear an insight as the world affords into the enormous difference that exists between the ideal and the actual. Matrimony does not illumine the difference so vividly, because matrimony, with all its disillusions, leaves her an unembarrassed conscience. With her lover such a woman experiences all the prose of wedlock, and a sting to boot. A man cannot be at concert-pitch all day long with his mistress any more easily than with his wife. She has to submit to bills and other practical matters just as much with a smirched reputation as she had with a spotless one. The romance does not wear any better because the Marriage Service is omitted. A lover is no less liable to be commonplace than a husband when the laundress knocks the buttons off his shirts.

Yes, Mamie was infatuated by Field; she had not sinned with a cool head simply to

procure a guide up Parnassus. But she had hoped to pick a few laurels there all the same. She found herself in a little flat in the rue Tronchet. They had few visitors, and those who did come were men who talked a language that she did not understand, but who looked things that she understood only too well.

The remorse and humiliation that she felt was not leavened by any consciousness of advancing in her art. Field rather pooh-poohed her art, as the months went by after the decree *nisi* was pronounced. He still discussed his work with her—perhaps less as if she had been a sybil, but still with interest in her ideas. Her own work, however, bored him now. He had no intention of being cold, but the subject seemed puerile to his mind. If she did write a play that was produced one day, or if she didn't, what earthly consequence was it? She would never write a great one; and these panting aspirations which begot such mediocre results savoured to him of a storm in a teacup—of a furnace lit to boil the kettle.

He was rather sorry that he had run away with her, but he did not regret it particularly. Of course he would marry her as soon as he could—he owed her that; and, since he was not such a blackguard as to contemplate

deserting her by-and-by, he might just as well marry her as not. The whole affair had been a folly certainly. He was not rich, and he was extravagant; he would have done better to remain as he was. Still many men envied him. He trusted fervently she would not have children, though! It didn't seem likely; but if she ever did, the error would be doubled. He did not want a son who had cause to be ashamed of his mother when he grew up.

It was curious that she did not refer more often to his legalising their union. Her position pained her, he could see, and made her very frequently a dull companion. That was the worst of these things! One paid for the step dearly enough to expect lively society in return, and yet, if one complained of mournfulness, one would be a brute. He would write a drama some time or other to show that it was really the man who was deserving of sympathy in such an alliance. It would be very original, as he would treat it. The lover should explain his situation to another woman whom he had learnt to love since, and—well, he didn't see how it should end:—with the dilemma repeated? And it didn't matter, after all, for nobody would have the courage to produce it!

He made these reflections in his study. In the salon—furnished in accordance with the

tastes of the lady who had sub-let the flat to them for six months—Mamie stood staring down at the street. It was four o'clock, and, saving for half an hour at luncheon, she had not seen him since ten. For distraction she could make her choice among some Tauchnitz novels, her music, and a walk. Excepting that the room was tawdry and ill-ventilated, and that she had lost her reputation, it was not unlike her life in South Kensington.

In her pocket was a letter from her father—the most difficult letter that it had ever fallen to Dick Cheriton's lot to compose. Theoretically he thought social prejudices absurd—as became an artist to whom God had given his soul—and he had often insisted on their ineptitude. In the case of his own daughter, however, he would have preferred to see them treated with respect. There was a likeness to Lucas Field here. Field also dwelt on the hill-top, but he wanted his son, if he ever had one, to boast a stainless mother. Cheriton had not indited curses, like the fathers in melodrama, and the people who have "found religion"; only parents in melodrama, and some "Christians" who go to church twice every Sunday, are infamous enough to curse their children; he had told her that if she found herself forsaken, she was to cable for

her passage-money back to Duluth. But that he was ashamed and broken by what she had done, he had not attempted to conceal; and as she stood there, gazing down on the rue Tronchet, Mamie was recalling the confession to which this was an answer. Phrases that she had used came back to her :—" I have done my best, but my love was too strong for me "; " Wicked as it may be to say it, I know that, even in my guilt, I shall always be happy. I met the right man too late, but I am so young—I could not suffer all my life without him. Forgive me if you can." Had she—it was a horrible thought—had she been mistaken? Had she blundered more terribly than when she married? For, unless her prophecies of joy to the brim were fulfilled—unless her measure of thanksgiving overflowed—the blunder *was* more terrible, infinitely more terrible : she was a gambler who had staked her soul, in her conviction of success.

The question was one that she had asked herself many times before, without daring to hear the answer; but that the answer was in her heart, though she shrank from acknowledging it, might be seen in her expression, in her every pose; it might be seen now, as she drooped by the window. She sighed, and sat down, and shivered. Yes, she knew it—she

had thrown away the substance for the shadow; she could deceive herself no longer. Lucas Field was not so poetical a personality as she had imagined; guilt had no glamour; her devotion had been a flash in the pan—a madness that had burned itself out. She had no right to blame her lover for that; only, the prospect of marriage with him filled her with no elation; it inspired misgiving rather. If she had made a blunder, would it improve matters to perpetuate it? He was considerate to her, he spared her all the ignominy that was possible; but instinctively she was aware that, if they parted, he would never miss her as her husband had done. In *his* life she would never make a hole! She guessed the depth of Heriot's love better now that she had obtained a smaller one as plummet. Between the manner of the man who was not particularly sorry to have run away with her, and his whose pride she had been, the difference was tremendous to a woman whose position was calculated to develop her natural sensitiveness to the point of a disease.

Should she marry Lucas or not? Hitherto she had merely avoided the query; now she trembled before it. Expedience said, "Yes"; something within her said, "No." The decree would be made absolute in two months' time.

What was to become of her if they separated? To Duluth she could never go, to be pointed at and despised! She sighed again.

"Bored, dear?" asked Field, in the doorway.

"I was thinking."

"That was obvious. Not of your—er—work?"

"No, not of my—'er—work.'"

He pulled his moustache with some embarrassment.

"I didn't mean anything derogatory to it."

"Oh, I know," she said wearily; "don't—it doesn't matter. You can't think much less of it than I am beginning to do myself. You can't take much less interest in it."

"You are unjust," said Field.

"I am moped. Take me out. Take me out of myself if you can, but take me out of doors at any rate! I am yearning to be in a crowd."

"We might go to a theatre to-night," he said; "would you like to?"

"It doesn't amuse me very much; I don't understand what they say. Still it would be something. But I want to go out now, for a walk. I don't like walking here alone; can't you come with me?"

"I'm afraid I can't. You forget I promised an interview to that paper this afternoon. I expect the fellow here any moment."

"You promised it?" she exclaimed, with surprise. "Why, I thought you said that the paper was a 'rag' and that you wouldn't dream of consenting?"

"After all, one must be courteous; I changed my mind. There's some talk of translating *A Clever Man's Son* into French. An interview just now would be good policy."

"You are going to be adapted? *A Clever Man's Son?*"

"Translated," he said. "I may adapt; I *am*—translated."

She smiled, but perceived almost at the same instant that she had not been intended to do so and that he had said it seriously.

"I make a very good interview," he continued, lighting a cigarette; "I daresay you've noticed it. I never count an epigram or two wasted, though they do go into another chap's copy. That's where many men make a mistake; or very likely they can't invent the epigrams. Anyhow, they don't! The average interview is as dull as the average play. People think it's the journalists' fault, but it isn't. It's the fault of the deadly dull dogs who've got nothing to tell them. I ought to have gone a good deal further than I have: I've the two essential qualities for success—I'm an artist and a showman."

"Don't!" she murmured; "don't!"

He laughed gaily.

"I'm perfectly frank; I admit the necessities of life—I've told you so before. My mind never works so rapidly as it does in prospect of a good advertisement. There the fellow is, I expect!" he added, as the bell rang. "The study is quite in disorder for him, and there are a bunch of Parma violets and a flask of maraschino on the desk. I'm going to remark that maraschino and the scent of violets are indispensable to me when I work. He won't believe it, unless he is very young, but he'll be immeasurably obliged; that sort of thing looks well in an interview. Violets and maraschino are a graceful combination, I think."

She did not reply; she sat pale and chagrined. He was renowned enough, and more than talented enough to dispense with these stage-tricks in the library. She knew it, and *he* knew it, but he could not help them. Awhile ago they had caused her the cruellest pain; now she was more contemptuous than anything else, although she was still galled that he should display his foibles so candidly. "I am quite frank," he had said. She found such "frankness" a milestone on the road that she had travelled.

"My dear child," said Field, "among the illusions of a man's youth is the belief that, if he goes through life doing his humble best in an unobtrusive way, the Press will say what a jolly fine fellow he is, and hold him up as a pattern to all the braggarts and poseurs who are blowing their own trumpets, and scraping on their own fiddles. Among the things he learns as he grows older is the fact that, if he does his best in an unobtrusive way, the Press will say nothing about him at all. The fiddle and the trumpet are essential; but it is possible to play them with a certain amount of refinement. It is even possible—though a clever man cannot dispense with the fiddle and the trumpet—for the fiddle and the trumpet to be played so dexterously that he may dispense with cleverness. I do not go to such lengths myself——"

"You have no need to do so," she said coldly.

"I have no need to do so—thank you. But I can quite conceive that, say, violets and maraschino, worked for all they were worth, might alone make a man famous. A mouse liberated a lion, and things smaller than a mouse have created one before now. The violet in the hedgerow 'bloomed unseen,'—or 'died unknown,' was it? it did something

modest and unsuccessful, I know. The violet assiduously paragraphed and paraded might lead to fortune."

"I would rather be obscure and do honest, conscientious work," answered Mamie, "than write rubbish, and finesse myself into popularity."

"It is much easier," he said tranquilly. "To be obscure is the one thing that *is* easy still. You don't mind my saying that I hate the adjectives you used, though, do you? The words 'honest' and 'conscientious,' applied to literature, dearest, make me shudder. I am always afraid that 'wholesome' is coming in the next sentence."

"Are you going to say so to your interviewer?"

"The remark isn't brilliant. It was sincere, and to be sincere and brilliant at the same time is a little difficult. . . . I've been both, though, in the scene I've just done; you must read it, or rather I'll read it to you. You'll be pleased with it. As soon as the piece is finished I must write to Erskine. It will suit the Pall Mall down to the ground, and I should like it done there, only——"

"Only what?"

Field hesitated.

"I meant it for Erskine from the start. He

saw the scenario, and the part fits him like a glove."

"But what were you going to say?"

"Well, I fancy he has some idea that a piece of mine just now—— You understand, with the case so fresh in people's minds! . . . Erskine's a fool. What on earth does the public care? Of course he'll do it when he reads the part he's got! Only I know he's doubting whether my name 'd be a judicious card to play yet awhile."

There was a pause, in which her heart contracted painfully.

"I see," she rejoined, in a low voice.

He fidgeted before the mirror, and glanced at his watch.

"That fellow must be getting impatient."

"You had better go in to him," she said.

"Well, we'll go to the Vaudeville, or somewhere to-night, Mamie—that's arranged?"

"Yes, to the Vaudeville, or somewhere," she assented, with another sigh.

She went back to the window, and stared at the rue Tronchet with wet eyes.

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER X

Some weeks afterwards Field went to England. He did not take Mamie with him, for he intended to remain only a few days, nor had she been at all desirous of accompanying him. She had begun, indeed, to see that she did not know what she did desire. Her life in Paris oppressed her; the notion of Duluth was horrible; and the thought of living with Lucas in London, where she might meet an acquaintance of Heriot's at any turn, was repugnant to an almost equal degree.

Field was unexpectedly detained in London. The business that had been responsible for his journey constantly evaded completion, and after he had been gone about a month a letter came, in which he mentioned incidentally that he had a touch of influenza. After this letter a fortnight went by without her hearing from him; and, rendered anxious at last, she wrote to inquire if his silence was attributable to his indisposition—if the latter was of a serious nature.

Her mind did not instantaneously grasp the significance of the telegram that she tore open a few hours later. It ran:

" My nephew dangerously ill. If you desire to see him, better come.—PORTEOUS."

She stood gazing at it. Who had telegraphed? Who—— Then she understood that it was Lucas that was meant. Lucas was " dangerously ill "! She must go to him. She must go at once! She was so staggered by the suddenness of the intelligence that she was momentarily incapable of recollecting when the trains left, or how she should act in order to ascertain. All she realised was that this was Paris, and that Lucas lay " dangerously ill " in London, and that she had to reach him. Her head swam, and the little French that she knew seemed to desert her; the undertaking looked enormous—beset with difficulties that were almost insuperable.

The stupidity of the *bonne*, for whom she pealed the bell, served to sharpen her faculties a trifle, but she made her preparations as in a dream. When she found herself in the train, it appeared to her unreal that she could be there. The interval had left no salient impressions on her brain, nothing but a confused sense of delay. It was only now that she felt able to reflect.

The telegram was crumpled in her pocket, and she took it out and re-read it agitatedly. How did this relative come to be at the hotel?

Lucas had scarcely spoken of his relations. "If you desire to see him"! The import of those words was frightful—he could not be expected to recover. Her stupefaction rolled away, and was succeeded by a fever of suspense. The restriction of the compartment was maddening, and she looked at her watch a dozen times, only to find that not ten minutes had passed since she consulted it last.

It seemed to her that she had been travelling for at least two days, when she stood outside a bedroom in a little hotel off Bond Street and tapped at the door with her heart in her throat.

The door was opened by a woman whose dress proclaimed her to be an institution nurse. Field slept, and Mamie sank into a chair, and waited for his wakening.

"How is he?" she asked in a low tone.

The nurse shook her head.

"He's not doing as well as we could wish, ma'am."

"Is Mr. Porteous here?"

"*Mrs.* Porteous. She'll be coming presently. She lives close by."

So it was a woman who had telegraphed! Somehow she had assumed unquestioningly that it was a man. "If you desire to see him——" Ah, yes, she might have known it! An aunt, who would be frigid and contemptuous,

of course. Well, she deserved that, she would have no right to complain; nor was it to be expected that Lucas's family should show her much consideration, though she could not perceive that she had done them any injury.

Two hours passed before she had an interview with the lady. Mamie was in the room that she had engaged in the meanwhile. She had bathed her face, and was making ready to return to the sick-room, when she was told that Mrs. Porteous was inquiring for her.

"Won't you come in?" she asked. "Our voices won't disturb him here."

Mrs. Porteous entered gingerly. She was a massive woman, of middle age, fashionably dressed. Her expression suggested no grief, only a vague fear of contamination. She had telegraphed to Paris because she felt that it was her duty to do so; but she had not telegraphed until it was almost certain that the patient would not rally sufficiently to make a will.

"You are—er—Mrs. Heriot?" she said, regarding her curiously. "The doctor thought that Mr. Field's condition ought to be made known to you; so I wired."

"Thank you; it was very kind."

"The doctor advised it," said Mrs. Porteous again, significantly.

"Is he—is there no hope?"

"We fear not; my nephew is sinking fast—

it's as well you should understand it. If you think it necessary to remain—— I see you have taken a room? As—as 'Mrs. Field,' I presume?"

"I should have been 'Mrs. Field,' if Lucas——"

His aunt shivered.

"There are things we need not discuss. Of course I'm aware that you are living under my nephew's name. I was about to say that if you think it necessary to remain till the end, I have no opposition to offer; but the end is very near now. My telegram must have prepared you? I should not have wired unless——"

"I understood," answered Mamie, "yes. I am glad that your nephew had a relative near him, though your name was quite strange to me. He never mentioned it."

"Really! Lucas called to see us at once. Our house is in the neighbourhood."

"He wrote me," said Mamie, "that he had a touch of influenza. It seems extraordinary that influenza should prove so serious? He was strong, he was in good health——"

The other's air implied that she did not find it necessary to discuss this either.

"People die of influenza, or the results of it, every year," she said. "The doctor will give you any information you may desire, no doubt. You must excuse me—I may be wanted."

While Field lingered she never left his side, after Mamie's arrival. Men committed preposterous actions on their death-beds, and though he was not expected to recover consciousness, there was the possibility that he might do so. If an opportunity occurred, his mistress would doubtless produce a solicitor and a provision for herself with the rapidity of a conjuring trick. As it was, Mrs. Porteous had small misgivings but what he would die intestate. There might not be much, but at any rate, what he had should not swell the coffers of guilty wives!

Events proved that her summons had not been precipitate, however. Field spoke at the last a few coherent words, and took Mamie's hand. But that was all. Then he never spoke any more. Even as she stood gazing at the unfamiliar face on the pillow, the swiftness of the catastrophe made it difficult for the girl to realise that all was over. The calamity had fallen on her like a thunderbolt—it seemed strange, inexplicable, untrue. The last time but one that he had talked to her, he had been full of vigour, packing a portmanteau, humming a tune, alluding to fees, some details of the theatre, the prospect of a smooth crossing. And now he was dead. There had been little or no transition; he was well—he was dead! The curtain had

tumbled in the middle of the play—and it would never go up any more.

It was not till after the funeral that she was capable of meditating on the change that Lucas Field's death had wrought in her life. She did not ask herself whether he had left her anything, or not. The idea that he might have done so never occurred to her, nor would she have felt that she could accept his bequest if he had made one. She perceived that she had nobody to turn to but her father, and to him she cabled.

Cheriton replied by two questions: What was Field's will? And would she like to return to Duluth? To the second she made a definite answer. "Impossible; pray don't ask me." And then there was an interval of correspondence.

While Mrs. Porteous rejoiced to find that her confidence was justified and that her nephew had died intestate, Mamie was contemplating the choice of swallowing her repugnance to going back to America, or of living with Mrs. Baines. Cheriton had written to them both, and that one course or the other should be adopted he was insistent. Mamie need not live in Lavender Street; Mrs. Baines might make her home in another neighbourhood, where they would be strangers. But that the girl should remain alone in England was out of the question. Which line of conduct did she prefer?

She could not decide immediately. Both proposals distressed her. On the whole, perhaps, the lesser evil was to resign herself to her Aunt Lydia if, as her father declared, her aunt was willing to receive her. Mrs. Baines, at any rate, was but one, while in Duluth half the population would be acquainted with her story.

But *was* her Aunt Lydia willing?—was she expected to write to her and inquire? She was not entitled to possess dignity, of course; but it was not easy to eat dust because the right to self-respect was forfeited.

She had removed to a lodging in Bernard Street, Bloomsbury, and in the fusty sitting-room she sat all day, lonely and miserable, reviewing the blunder of her life. She neither wrote nor read—her writing was an idea that she hated now; she merely thought—wishing she could recall the past, wondering how she could bear the future. One afternoon when she sat there, pale and heavy-eyed, the maid-of-all-work announced a visitor, and Mrs. Baines came in.

Mamie rose nervously, and the other advanced. She had rehearsed an interview which should be a compromise between the instructions that had been given by her brother, and the attitude of righteous rebuke that she felt to be a permissible luxury, but the forlornness

of the figure before her drove her opening sentence from her head. All she could utter was the girl's name; and then there was a pause in which they looked at each other.

"It is kind of you to come," Mamie murmured.

"I hope you're well?" said Mrs. Baines.

"Not very. I—— Won't you sit down?"

"I never thought I should see you like this, Mamie!" said the widow half involuntarily, shaking her head.

The girl made no answer in words. She caught her breath, and stood passive. If the lash fell she would suffer silently.

"We always see sin punished, though." She believed we always did; she retained such startling optimism. "It's not for me to reproach you."

"Thank you. I'm not too happy, Aunt Lydia."

"I daresay, my dear. I haven't come to make it worse for you."

She scrutinised her again. She would have been horrified to hear the suggestion, but her niece's presence was not without a guilty fascination, a pleasurable excitement, to her as she remembered that here was one who had broken the Seventh Commandment. She was sitting opposite a girl who had lived in Paris with a lover; and she was sitting opposite

her in circumstances which redounded to her own credit!

"I have heard from your father," she went on; "I suppose you know?"

"Yes," said Mamie; "he has written me."

"And do you wish to make your home with me again? I'm quite ready to take you if you like."

"I could never live in Lavender Street any more, Aunt Lydia. You must understand that—that it would be awful to me."

"Your father hinted at my moving. It will be a great trouble, but I shan't shirk my duty, dear Mamie. If it will make your burden any easier to bear, we will live together somewhere else. I say, if I can make your burden any easier for you, I will live somewhere else."

"I am not ungrateful. I . . . Yes, if you will have me, I should like to come to you."

Mrs. Baines sighed, and smoothed her skirt tremulously.

"To Balham?" she inquired.

"You are moving to Balham?"

"I was thinking about it. I was over there the other day to get some stuff for a bodice. It's nice and healthy, and the shopping is cheap."

"It's all the same to me where we go," said Mamie, "so long as the people don't know me."

"I hear you were living with—with *him* in

Paris? Operas, and drives, and all manner of things to soothe your conscience he gave you, no doubt?" said Mrs. Baines, in an awestruck invitation to communicativeness. "After that terrible life in Paris, Balham will seem quiet to you, I daresay; but perhaps you won't mind that?"

"No place can be too quiet for me. The quieter it is, the better I shall like it."

"That's as it should be! Though, I suppose, with *him* you were out among gaieties every night?" She waited for a few particulars again. As none were forthcoming: "Then I'll try to let the house, and we'll go over together and look at some in Balham as soon as you like, my dear," she continued. "Your father will see that I'm not put to any expense. In the meantime you'll stay where you are, eh? You know—you know I saw Mr. Heriot after you'd gone, don't you?"

"No," stammered the girl, lifting eager eyes. "You went to him?"

"The very next day, my dear, so it seemed! I thought I'd drop in and have a cup of tea with you, not having seen you for so long; and through missing a train, and having such a time to wait at the station, I was an hour and more late when I got to Kensington. He was at home. Of course I had no idea there was anything wrong; I shall never forget it—

never! You might have knocked me down with a feather when I heard you'd gone."

"What," muttered Mamie, "what did he say?"

"It was like this. I said to him, 'Dear Mamie's away, the servant tells me?' For naturally I thought you were visiting friends; 'as likely as not, she's with his family,' I thought to myself. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'you must prepare yourself for a shock, Mrs. Baines —my wife has left me.' 'Left you?' I said. 'Yes,' said he, so cool that it turned me a mask of blood to hear him, 'she's gone away with a lover.' 'Mr. Heriot!' I exclaimed— '*Mister* Heriot!' 'She left a note,' he said, 'so it's quite true. Do you think we need talk about it much? I don't know that a worthless woman is any loss,' he said."

"He said that?"

"Those were his very words, my dear. And that cool! I stared at him. I'd no mind to make excuses for you, Gawd knows; but, for all that, one's own flesh and blood wasn't going to be talked about like niggers in *my* hearing. When I got my wits together, I said, 'It seems to me I'd be sorrier for you, Mr. Heriot, if you took it different.' 'Oh,' said he in his superior way, 'would you? We needn't discuss my feelings, madam. Perhaps you'll stay and dine?' I was so angry that

I couldn't be civil to him. 'I thank you,' I said, 'I will not stay and dine. And I take the opportunity, Mr. Heriot, of telling you you're a brute!' With that I came away; but there was much more in between that I've forgotten. About the divorce it was. He said he had 'a duty to himself,' and that the man could marry you when you were divorced; which I suppose he *would* have done if he had lived? though whether your sin would have been any less, my dear, if an archbishop had performed the ceremony is a question that I couldn't undertake to decide. You must begin your life afresh, now that it's all 'absolute'—which I learn is the proper term—and you'll never be in a newspaper any more. Pray to Heaven for aid, and take heart of grace! And if it will relieve you to speak sometimes of those sinful months with—with the other one in Paris, why, you shall talk about them to me, my dear, and I won't reproach you."

Mamie was no longer listening. An emotion that she did not seek to define was roused in her as she wondered if Heriot could indeed have taken the blow so stoically as her aunt declared. She scarcely knew whether she wished to put faith in his demeanour or not, but the subject was one that filled her thoughts long after Mrs. Baines' departure. It was one to which she constantly recurred.

With less delay than might have been anticipated, the widow found a house in Balham to fulfil her requirements, and the removal was effected several months before No. 20, Lavender Street was sub-let.

The houses of this class differ from one another but slightly. Excepting that the one in Balham was numbered " 44," and that the street was called " Rosalie Road," Mamie could have found it easy to believe that she was re-installed in Wandsworth. It seemed to her sometimes as if the van that had removed the furniture had also brought the ground-floor parlour, with the miniature bay window overlooking the shrubs and the plot of mould. The back yard with the clothes prop, and the neighbours' yards with the continuous clatter, they too might have been transferred from Lavender Street; and so abiding was the clatter that even if she felt sleepy at nine o'clock, it was useless to go to bed before eleven. In view of this unintermittent necessity for back yards, she wondered how the inmates of more expensive houses for which back yards were not provided managed to support the deficiency. The women that she viewed, from the bedroom, among the clothes lines, or across the plot of mould, as they went forth with string bags, might have been the

Lavender Street tenants. And were they not the Lavender Street children, these who on week-days swung, unkempt, on the little creaking gates along the road, and on Sundays walked abroad in colours so grotesquely unsuited to them?

Such houses are, for the most part, happily, the crown of lives too limited to realise their limitations—too unsuccessful to be aware that they have failed. To Rosalie Road, Balham, with her Aunt Lydia for companion, the divorced woman at the age of twenty-six retired to remember that she had once hoped to be an artist, and had had the opportunity of being happy.

To-day she hoped for nothing. There was no scope for hope. If she could have awakened to find herself famous, her existence would have been coloured a little—though she knew that fame could not satisfy her now as it would once have done—but the ability to labour for distinction was gone. She was apathetic, she had no interest in anything. When six months had passed, she regarded death as the only event to which she could still look forward; when she had been here a year, a glimmer of relief entered into her depression—the doctor who had attended her, and sounded her lungs, told her that she " must take care of herself."

Sometimes a neighbour looked in, and spoke of dilapidations and the indifference of the landlord; of the reductions at a High Road linendraper's, and the whooping-cough. Sometimes a curate called to sell tickets for a concert more elementary than his sermons. In the afternoon she walked to Tooting Bec and stared at the bushes; in the evening she betook herself to the "circulating library," where *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Wide, Wide World* were displayed and the proprietor said he hadn't heard of Meredith—"perhaps she had made a mistake in the name?" God help her! She was guilty and she had left a husband desolate; but the music that she had dreamed of was the Opera on Wagner nights; the books that she had expected were copies containing signatures that were the envy o the autograph-collector; the circle that had been her aim was the world of literature and art. She lived at Balham; she saw the curate, and she heard of the dilapidations in the neighbour's roof. One year merged into another; and if she lived for forty more, the neighbour and the curate would be her All.

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XI

When five years had passed after the divorce, the Liberal Party came into power again, and George Heriot, Q.C., M.P., was appointed Solicitor-General. His work and ambitions had not sufficed to mend the gap in his life; but it had been in work and ambition that he endeavoured to find assuagement of the wound. Perhaps eagerness had never been so keen in him after his wife went as while he was contesting the borough that he represented now; perhaps he had never realised the inadequacy of success so fully as he did to-day when one of the richest prizes of his profession was obtained. Conscious that the anticipated flavour was lacking, the steps to which he might look forward still lost much of their allurement. Were he promoted to the post of Attorney-General, and raised to the Bench, he foresaw that it would elate him no more than it elated him now, as Sir George Heriot, and a very wealthy man, to recall the period when, as a struggling Junior, he had sat up half the night to earn a guinea.

The five years had left their mark upon him; the hours of misery which no one suspected had left their mark upon him. The lines about his eyes and mouth had deepened; his hair was greyer, his figure less erect. Men who, in their turn, sat up half the night to earn a guinea, envied him, cited his career as an example of brilliant luck—the success of others is always "luck"—and, though they assumed that a fellow was "generally cut up a bit when his wife went wrong," found it difficult to conceive that Sir George had permitted domestic trouble to alloy his triumphs to any great extent. Nobody imagined that there were still nights when he suffered scarcely less acutely than on the one when he returned to discover that Mamie had gone; nobody guessed that there were evenings when his loneliness was almost unbearable to the dry, self-contained man—that moments came when he took from a drawer the likeness that had once stood on his desk and yearned over it in despair. That was his secret; pride forbade that he should share it with another. He contemned himself that he did suffer still. A worthless woman should not be mourned. Out of his life should be out of his memory; such weakness shamed him!

In August, a week or so after the vacation

began, he went to stay at Sandhills. His object in going to Sandhills was not wholly to see his brother, and still less was it to see his sister-in-law. He was solitary, he was wretched, and he was only forty-seven years of age. He had been questioning for some time whether the wisest thing he could do would not be to marry again; he sought no resumption of rapture, but he wanted a home. An estimable wife, perhaps a son, would supply new interests; and the vague question that had entered his mind had latterly been emphasised by his introduction to Miss Pierways, who, he was aware, was now the guest of Lady Heriot.

Miss Pierways was the daughter of a lady who had been the Hon. Mrs. Pierways, and whose straitened circumstances had debarred her from the suite in Hampton Court that she might otherwise have had at the period of her husband's death. The widow and the girl had retired to obscure lodgings; the only break in the monotony of the latter's existence being an occasional visit to some connections, or friends, at whose places it was hoped that she might form a desirable alliance. The most stringent economies had to be practised in order to procure passable frocks for these visits, but the opportunities had led to no

result, though she had beauty. And then an extraordinary event occurred. When the girl was twenty-eight, the widow who, for once, had reluctantly accepted an invitation to accompany her, received an offer of marriage herself, and became the wife of an American who was known to be several times over a millionaire.

For one door that had been ajar to the daughter of the Hon. Mrs. Pierways, with nothing but her birth and her appearance to recommend her, a hundred doors flew open to the step-daughter of Henry Van Buren; and it was shortly after the startling metamorphosis in the fortunes of the pair that Heriot had first met them.

The dowry that Agnes Pierways might bring to her husband weighed with him very little, for he was in a position to disregard such considerations. But Miss Pierways' personality appeared to him suggestive of all the qualifications that he sought in the lady whom he should marry. Without her manner being impulsive or girlish, she was sufficiently young to be attractive. She was handsome, and in a slightly statuesque fashion that bore promise of the serenity which he told himself was now his aim. Certainly if he did re-marry—and he was contemplating the step very seriously—it

would be difficult to secure a partner to fulfil his requirements more admirably than Miss Pierways. Whether he fulfilled hers, he could ascertain when he had fully made up his mind. It was with the intention of making up his mind, in proximity to the lady, that he had gone to Sandhills; and one evening, when he was alone in the smoking-room with his brother, the latter blundered curiously enough on to the bull's-eye of his meditations.

"I wonder," said Sir Francis, "that you've never thought of re-marrying, George?"

"My experience of matrimony was not fortunate," answered Heriot, smoking slowly, but with inward perturbation.

"Your experience of matrimony was a colossal folly. All things considered, the consequences might easily have been a good deal worse."

"I don't follow you."

"Between ourselves, the end never seemed to me so regrettable as you think it."

"My wife left me."

"And you divorced her! And you have no children."

"If I had had children," said Heriot musingly, "it is a fact that the consequences would have been worse."

"But in any case," said the Baronet, "it

was a huge mistake. Really one may be frank, in the circumstances! You married madly. The probability is that if your wife had been—if you were living together still, you would be a miserable man to-day. It was a very lamentable affair, of course, when it happened, but regarding it coolly—in looking back on it—don't you fancy that perhaps things are just as well as they are?"

"I was very fond of my wife," replied Heriot, engrossed by his cigar.

"To an extent," said Sir Francis indulgently, "no doubt you had an affection for her. But, my dear fellow, what companionship had you? Was she a companion?"

"I don't know."

"Was she interested in your career? Could she understand your ways of thought? Was she used to your world? One doesn't ask a great deal of women, but had you any single thing in common?"

"I don't know," said Heriot again.

Sir Francis shrugged his shoulders.

"Take my word for it that, with such a girl as you married, your divorce wasn't an unmixed evil. It wasn't the release one would have chosen, but at least it was better for you than being tied to her for life. Damn it, George! what's the use of blinking the matter

now? She was absolutely unsuited to you in every way; you must admit it!"

"I suppose she was. At the same time I was happy with her."

"How long would the infatuation have lasted?"

"It lasted more than three years."

"Would it have lasted another five?"

"Speaking honestly, I believe it would."

"Though you had nothing in common?"

"I don't explain," said Heriot. "I tell you, I was happy with her, that's all. Viewing it dispassionately, I suppose she *was* unsuited to me—I don't know that we did have anything in common; I don't see any justification for the fool's paradise I lived in. But for all that, if I married again, I should never care for the woman as—as I cared for *her*. In fact, I should merely marry to——" He was about to say "to try to forget her"—"to make a home for myself," he said, instead.

"Have you considered such a step?" asked Sir Francis.

"Sometimes, yes."

"The best thing you could do—a very proper thing for you to do. . . . Anybody in particular?"

"It's rather premature——"

"You're not in chambers, old fellow!"

"What do you think of Miss Pierways?" inquired Heriot after a scarcely perceptible pause.

"A very excellent choice! I should congratulate you heartily. We had not noticed the—— And Catherine is very acute in these matters——"

"There has been nothing to notice; probably she would refuse me point-blank. But in the event of my determining to marry again, I've wondered whether Miss Pierways wouldn't be the lady I proposed to."

"I don't think you could do better."

"Really? You don't think I'm too old for her?"

"On my honour! 'Too old for her'? Not a bit, a very sensible marriage! I'm not surprised that you should be attracted by her."

"'Attracted by her,'" said Heriot, "suggests rather more than the actual facts. I appreciate her qualities, but I can't say I'm sensible of any attachment. I'm sorry that I'm not. I appreciate her so fully that I am anxious to be drawn towards her a little more. I'm somewhat past the age for ardent devotion, but I couldn't take a wife as I might buy a horse. Of course, I've not been very much in her society. Er—down here, I dare-

say, when I come to know her better—— Have you met Van Buren? "

"In town, before he sailed. He is in New York, you know. I like them all. We were very pleased to have the mother and the girl come to us. . . . Well, make your hay while the sun shines!"

"It isn't shining," said Heriot; "I'm just looking east, waiting for it to rise. But I'm glad to have talked to you; as soon as the first ray comes I think I'll take your advice. I *ought* to marry, Francis; I know you're right."

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XII

THE more he reflected the more he was convinced of it; in marriage lay his chance of contentment. And during the ensuing fortnight his approval of Miss Pierways deepened. The house would not fill until the following month, and the smallness of the party there at present was favourable to the development of acquaintance.

Excepting that she was a trifle cold, there was really no scope for adverse criticism upon Miss Pierways. She was unusually well read, took an intelligent interest in matters on which women of her age were rarely informed, and was accomplished to the extent that she played the piano after dinner with brilliant execution and admirable hands and wrists. Her coldness, theoretically, was no drawback to him, and Heriot was a little puzzled by his own attitude. Her air was neither so formal as to intimate that his advances would be unwelcome, nor so self-conscious as to repel him by the warmth of its encouragement; yet, in spite of his admiration, the idea of proposing

to her dismayed him when he forced himself to approach the brink.

His vacillation was especially irritating since he had learned that the ladies were at the point of joining Van Buren in New York. The opportunity of which he was failing to take advantage would speedily be past, and he dreaded that if he suffered it to escape him, he would recall the matter with regret. He perceived as well, however, that if he were precipitate, he might regret that too, and he was sorry that they were not remaining in Europe longer.

One evening, when their departure was being discussed, the mother expressed surprise that he had never visited America, though she had had no curiosity about it, herself, until she married an American; and in answer Heriot declared that he had frequently thought of "running across during the long vacation."

"If you ever do," she said, "I hope you will choose a year when we are there."

"To tell you the truth, I was thinking of it this year."

"We may see you in New York, Sir George?" said Miss Pierways. "Really? How strange that will seem! I've been eager to go to New York all my life; but now that I'm going, I'm rather afraid. The

idea of a great city where I haven't any friends——"

"But you will have many friends, Agnes."

"By-and-by," answered Miss Pierways. "Yes, I suppose so. But it's very fatiguing *making* friends, don't you think so? And I tremble at the voyage."

"How delightful it would be," remarked Mrs. Van Buren, "if we were going by the same steamer, Sir George!"

Heriot laughed.

"It would be very delightful to me to make the voyage in your company. But I might bore you frightfully; a week at sea must be a severe test. I should be afraid of being found out."

"We are promised other passengers," observed Miss Pierways, looking down with a faint smile. Her archness was a shade stiff, but her neck was one of her chief attractions.

"Why don't you go, George?" said Lady Heriot cheerfully. "You'd much better go by Mrs. Van Buren's boat than any other; and you've been talking of making a trip to America 'next year' ever since I've known you!"

This amiable fiction was succeeded by fresh protestations from Mrs. Van Buren that no arrangement could be more charming, and

Heriot, half against his will, half with pleasure, found himself agreeing to telegraph in the morning to inquire if he could obtain a berth.

He hardly knew whether he was sorry or glad when he had done so. That the step would result in an engagement might be predicted with a tolerable degree of certainty, and he would have preferred to arrive at an understanding with himself under conditions that savoured less of coercion.

Since a state-room proved to be vacant, however, he could do no less now than engage it; and everybody appeared so much pleased, and Miss Pierways was so very gracious, that the misgivings that disturbed him looked momentarily more unreasonable than ever.

The night before he sailed, in their customary chat over whisky and cigars, Sir Francis said to him :

" ' Ask, and it shall be given unto you ' ! "

" I'm inclined to think you're right," said his brother. " I suppose it will end in it. . . . She's a trifle like a well-bred machine—doesn't it strike you so ?—warranted never to get out of order ! " The other's look was significant, and Heriot added, " Very desirable in a wife, of course ! Only somehow——"

" ' Only somehow ' you're eccentric, George —you always were ! "

"It's not my reputation," said Heriot drily; "I believe that I'm considered particularly practical."

"Reputations," retorted the Baronet, attempting an epigram, as he sometimes did in the course of his second whisky-and-potash, and failing signally in the endeavour, "are like tombstones—generally false." He realised the reality of tombstones, and became controversial. "*I've* known you from a boy, and I say you were always eccentric. It was nothing but your eccentricity that you had to thank before. Here's a nice girl, a girl who will certainly have a good settlement, a girl who's undeniably handsome, ready to say 'yes' at the asking, and you grumble—I'm hanged if you don't grumble!—because you see she is to be depended on. What the devil do you want?"

"I want to be fond of her," answered Heriot. "I admit all you've said of her; I want to like her more."

"So you ought to; but what does it matter if you don't? All women are alike to the men who've married them after a year or two. She'll make an admirable mother, and that's the main thing, I suppose?"

Was it?

Heriot recalled the criticism during his first

day on board. Neither of the ladies was visible until Queenstown was reached, and he paced the deck, pursuing his reflections by the aid of tobacco. She would "make an admirable mother, and that was the main thing"! Of the second half of the opinion he was not so sure. To marry a woman simply because one believed she would shine in a maternal capacity was somewhat too altruistic, he thought. However, he was fully aware that Miss Pierways had other recommendations.

She appeared with her mother at the head of the companion-way while he was wishing that he hadn't come, and he found their chairs for them, and arranged their rugs, and subsequently gave their letters to the steward to be posted.

After leaving Queenstown, Mrs. Van Buren's sufferings increased, and the girl, who, saving for a brief interval, was well and cheerful, was practically in his charge. It was Heriot who accompanied her from the saloon after breakfast, and strolled up and down with her till she was tired. When the chair and the rug—the salient features of a voyage are the woman, the chair, and the rug—were satisfactorily arranged, it was he who sat beside her, talking. Flying visits she made below, while her mother kept her cabin; but for the most part she

was on deck—or in the saloon, or in the reading-room—and for the most part Heriot was the person to whom she looked for conversation. If he had been a decade or two younger, he would probably have proposed to her long before they sighted Sandy Hook, and it surprised him that he did not succumb to the situation as it was. A woman is nowhere so dangerous, and nowhere is a man so susceptible, as at sea. The interminable days demand flirtation, if one is not to perish of boredom. Moonlight and water are notoriously potent, even when viewed for only half an hour; and at sea, the man and the girl look at the moonlight on the water together regularly every evening. And it is very becoming to the girl. Miss Pierways' face was always a disappointment to Heriot at breakfast. The remembrance of its factitious softness the previous night made its hardness in the sunshine look harder. He wondered if it was the remembrance of its hardness at breakfast that kept him from proposing to her when they loitered in the moonlight. He was certainly doing his best to fall in love with her, and everything conspired to assist him; but the days went on, and the momentous question remained unuttered.

"We shall soon be there," she said one

evening as they strolled about the deck after dinner. "I'm beginning to be keen. Have you noticed how everybody is saying, 'New York' now? At first no one alluded to it—we mightn't have been due for a year—and since yesterday nobody's talking of anything else!"

"Nearly everyone I've spoken to seems to have made the trip half a dozen times," said Heriot. "I feel dreadfully untravelled in the smoking-room. When are you going to Niagara? Niagara is one of the things I'm determined not to miss."

"I was talking to some girls who have lived in New York all their lives—when they weren't in Europe—and they haven't been there yet. They told me they had been to the panorama in Westminster!"

"I have met a Londoner who had never been to the Temple."

"No? How perfectly appalling!" she exclaimed, none the less fervently because she hadn't been to it herself. "Oh yes, I know I shall adore Niagara! I want to see a great deal of America while I'm there."

"I wish *I* had time to see more; I should like to go to California."

"I wouldn't see California for any consideration on earth!" she declared. "California, to me, is Bret Harte—I should be so afraid of

being disillusioned. When we went to Ireland once, do you know, Sir George, it was a most painful shock to me! My ideas of Ireland were founded on Dion Boucicault's plays—I expected to see all the peasants in fascinating costumes, with their hair down their backs, just as one sees them on the stage. The reality was terrible. I shudder when I recall the disappointment."

"I sympathise."

"Of course you're laughing at me! I shall have my revenge, if you don't like New York. But, I don't know—I may feel guilty. You mustn't blame us if you don't like New York, Sir George. Fortunately you won't have time to be very bored, though; will you?"

"'Fortunately'?"

"Fortunately if it doesn't amuse you, I mean. When does the—how do you say it? When does your holiday end?"

"I must be back in London on the twenty-fourth of next month; I'm almost American myself. I shall have such a fleeting glimpse of the country, that I must really think of writing a book about it."

"You have something better to do than write vapid books. To me your profession seems the most fascinating one there is. If I were a man, I'd rather be called to the Bar

than anything. You'd be astonished if you knew how many biographies of eminent lawyers I've read—they enthralled me as a child. I don't know any career that suggests such power to me as the Bar. Don't smile : sometimes, when we're talking and I remember the tremendous influence you wield, I tremble."

She lifted her eyes to him, deprecating her enthusiasm, which was too palpably a pose, and again Heriot was conscious that the opportunity was with him, if he could but grasp it. They had paused by the taffrail, and he stood looking at her, trying to speak the words that would translate their relations to a definite footing. He no longer had any doubt as to her answer; he could foresee her reply—at least the manner of her reply—with disturbing clearness. He knew that she would hesitate an instant, and droop her head, and ultimately murmur correct phrases that would exhilarate him not at all. In imagination he already heard her tones, as she promised to be his wife. He supposed, as they were screened from observation, that he might take her hand. How passionless, how mechanical and flat it would all be ! He replied with a commonplace, and after a few moments they continued their stroll. When he turned in, however, he reproached himself more forcibly than he

had done yet, and his vacillation was by no means at an end. He was at war, not with his judgment, but with his instinct, and it was the perception of this fact that always increased his perturbation.

They landed the following day, and, after being introduced to Mr. Van Buren in the custom-house, Heriot drove to an hotel. The hotel he found excellent; New York he found wonderful, but a city different from what he had expected. He had vaguely pictured New York as a Paris where everybody talked English. This was before the introduction of the automobile had changed the face of Paris, and the face of the Parisian—before it incidentally reduced the number of half-fed horses barbarously used in that city, which is the negro's paradise, and the "horse's hell"—and the Boulevard was even more unlike Broadway then than now. Broadway, broad in name only till it spread into the brightness of Union Square, suggested London more than Paris—London in an unprecedented burst of energy. The tireless vigour of the throng, the ubiquitous rush of the Elevated Railway confused him. Though he paid homage to the cuisine of America, which proved as much superior to that of England as the worst transatlantic train was to our best of that

period, he told himself that he was disappointed. The truth was that, not wishing to take the Van Burens' invitations too literally, and having no other acquaintances here, he was dull.

American hospitality, however, is the most charming in the world, and he spent several very agreeable hours inside the big brownstone house. Nothing could have exceeded the geniality of Van Buren's manner, nor was this due solely to the position of his visitor and a hope of their becoming connected. The average American business man will show more kindness to a stranger, who intrudes into his office, than most Englishmen display to one who comes to them with a letter of introduction from a friend, and Van Buren's welcome was as sincere as it was attractive.

Heriot stayed in New York a week, and then fulfilled his desire to visit Niagara. On his return he called in Fifth Avenue again. He was already beginning to refer to his homeward voyage, and he was still undetermined whether he would propose to Miss Pierways or not. The days slipped by without his arriving at a conclusion; and then one morning he told himself he had gone too far to retreat now—that the step, which was doubtless the most judicious he could take, should be made without delay.

He called at the house the same afternoon—for on the next day but one the *Etruria* sailed—and he found the ladies at home. He sat down, wondering if he would be left alone with Miss Pierways and take his departure engaged to her. But for half an hour there seemed no likelihood of a tête-à-tête. Presently there were more callers and they were shown into another room. Mrs. Van Buren begged him to excuse her. He rose to leave, but was pressed to remain.

"I want to talk to you when they've gone," she said; "I haven't half exhausted my list of messages to London."

Heriot resumed his seat, and Miss Pierways smiled.

"Poor mamma wishes she were going herself, if she told the truth! Now that we're here, it is I who like New York, not she."

"We're creatures of custom," he said; "your mother has lived in London too long to accustom herself to America very easily. . . . Of course you'll be over next season?"

"Oh yes. Shall you ever come to America again, Sir George?"

"I—I hardly know," he answered. "I certainly hope to."

"Oh, then, you will! You're your own master."

"Is anybody his own master?"

"To the extent of travelling to America, many people, I should think!"

He remembered with sudden gratification that he had never said a word to her that might not have been spoken before a crowd of listeners. What was there to prevent his withholding the proposal if he liked!

"I've no doubt I shall come," he said abstractedly.

She looked slightly downcast. It was not the reply that she had hoped to hear.

"I shall always owe a debt of gratitude to you and to Mr. and Mrs. Van Buren for making my visit so pleasant to me," he found himself saying next. "My trip has been a delightful experience."

She murmured a conventional response, but chagrin began to creep about her heart.

Heriot diverged into allusions which advanced the position not at all. They spoke of New York, of England, of the voyage—she perfunctorily, and he with ever-increasing relief. And now he felt that he had been on the verge of the precipice for the last time. He had escaped—and by the intensity of his gratitude he realised how ill-judged had been his action in playing around it.

When Mrs. Van Buren reappeared, followed

by her husband, her daughter's face told her that the climax had not been reached; and bold in thanksgiving, Heriot excused himself when he was asked to dine with them that evening. Had he been offered the alternative of the next evening, he could not without rudeness have found a pretext for refusing; but on the morrow, as luck would have it, the Van Burens were dining out.

The footman opened the big door, and Heriot descended the steps with a sensation that was foreign to him, and not wholly agreeable. He knew that he did not want to marry Miss Pierways, and that he had behaved like a fool in trying to acquire the desire, but he was a little ashamed of himself. His conduct had not been irreproachable; and he was conscious that when the steamer sailed and the chapter was closed for good and all, he would be glad to have done with it. He had blundered badly. Nevertheless he would have blundered worse, and been a still greater fool, if the affair had terminated in an engagement. Of course his brother would say distasteful things when they met, and Lady Heriot would convey her extreme disapproval of him without saying anything. That he must put up with! Of two evils, he had at any rate chosen the lesser.

He repeated the assurance with still more

conviction on Saturday morning during the quarter of an hour in which the cab rattled him to the boat. The experience had been a lesson to him, and he was resolved that henceforward he would dismiss the idea of marriage from his mind. He saw his portmanteau deposited in his cabin, and he returned to the deck as the steamer began to move. The decks were in the confusion that obtains at first. Passengers still hung at the taffrail, taking a farewell gaze at friends on the landing-stage. The chairs were huddled in a heap, and stewards bustled among stacks of luggage, importuned at every second step with instructions and inquiries.

The deep pulsations sounded more regular; the long line of sheds receded; and the figures of the friends were as little dark toys, waving specks of white. Even the most constant among the departing began to turn away now. The hastening stewards were importuned more frequently than before. Everybody was in a hurry, and all the women in the crowd that flocked below seemed to be uttering the words "baggage" and "state-room" at the same time.

A few men were temporarily in possession of the deck, striding to and fro behind pipes or cigars. The regulation as to "No smoking

abaft this " was not in force yet, or was, at least, disobeyed at present. Heriot sauntered along the length of deck until it began to fill again. The pile of chairs received attention—they were set out in a row under the awning. The deck took a dryness and a whiteness, and a few passengers sat down, and questioned inwardly if they would find one another companionable. He bent his steps to the smoking-room. But it was empty and uninviting thus early, and he forsook it after a few minutes. As the door slammed behind him, he came face to face with the woman who had been his wife.

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIII

She approached—their gaze met—he had bowed, and passed her. Perhaps it had lasted a second, the mental convulsion in which he looked in her eyes; he did not know. He found a seat and sank into it, staring at the sky and sea, acutely conscious of nothing but her nearness. He could not tell whether it was despair or rejoicing that beat in him; he knew nothing but that the world had swayed, that life was in an instant palpitating and vivid—that he had seen her!

Then he knew that, in the intensity of emotion that shook him body and brain, there was a thrill of joy, inexplicable but insistent. But when he rose at last, he dreaded that he might see her again.

He did not see her till the evening—when he drew back at the door of the saloon as she came out. His features were imperturbable now and betrayed nothing, though her own, before her head drooped, were piteous in appeal.

He noted that she looked pale and ill, and that she wore a black dress with crape on it.

He wondered whether she had lost her father, or her aunt. Next morning he understood that it was her father, for he saw her sitting beside Mrs. Baines. So Dick Cheriton was dead. He had once been fond of Dick Cheriton. . . . The stranger in the black frock had once slept in his arms, and borne his name. . . . The sadness of a lifetime weighed on his soul.

He perceived that she shunned him by every means in her power. But they were bound to meet; and then across her face would flash the same look that he had seen at the foot of the companion-way; its supplication and abasement wrung him. Horrible as the continual meetings grew, in the reading-room, on deck, or below, their lines crossed a dozen times between breakfast and eleven o'clock at night. It became as torturous to Heriot as to her. He felt as if he had struck her, as he saw her whiten and shrink as he passed her by. Soon he hated himself for being here to cause her this intolerable pain.

It was on the evening of the third day that her endurance broke down and she made her petition. With a pang he recognised the voice of her messenger before he turned.

"Mrs. Baines!"

"You're surprised I should address you, Mr.

Heriot," she said. " I shouldn't have, but *she* wants me to beg you to speak to her, if it's only for five minutes. She implores you humbly to let her speak to you. She made me ask you; I couldn't say ' no.' "

His pulses throbbed madly, and momentarily he couldn't reply.

" What purpose would it serve? " he said in tones he struggled to make firm.

" She can't bear it, Mr. Heriot—*Sir* Heriot, I should say; I was forgetting, I'm sure I beg your pardon! She ' implores you humbly to let her speak to you '; I was to use those words. Won't you consent? She is ill, she's dying."

" Dying? " whispered Heriot by a physical effort.

She nodded slowly. " The doctor has told her. She won't be here long, poor girl. But whether she's to be pitied for it or not, it's hard to say; I don't think she'll be sorry to go. . . . My brother is gone, Sir Heriot."

His answer was inarticulate.

" We got there just at the end. If we had been too late, she—— She has been ailing a long while, but we didn't know it was so serious. When she saw you, it was awful for her. I—— Oh, what am I to tell her? She's waiting now! "

"Where?" said Heriot hoarsely.

"Will you come with me?"

"Show me," he said; "show me where she is."

He still heard the knell of it—"Dying!" He heard it as the lonely figure in the darkness rose:

"Thank you, I am grateful."

The familiar voice knocked at his heart.

"Mrs. Baines has told me you are ill. I am grieved to learn how ill you are."

"It doesn't matter. It was good of you to come; I thought you would. I—I have prayed to speak to you again!"

"It wasn't much to ask," he said; "I—am human."

He could see that she trembled painfully. He indicated the chair that she had left, and drew one closer for himself. Then for a minute there was silence.

"Do you hate me?" she said.

He shook his head. "Should I have come to tell you so?"

"But you can never forgive me?"

"Why distress yourself? If for a moment I hesitated to come, it was because I *knew* it would be distressing for you. Perhaps a refusal would have been kinder after all."

"No, no; I was sure you wouldn't refuse.

She doubted; but *I* was sure. I said you'd come when you heard about me."

"Is it so serious? What is it? Tell me; I know nothing."

"It's my lungs: they were never very strong, you remember. The doctor told me in Duluth: 'Perhaps a year,' if I am 'very careful.' I'm *not* very careful—it'll soon be all over. Don't look like that! Why should you care? *I* don't care—I don't want to live a bit. Only—— Do you think, if—if there's anything afterwards, that a woman who's gone wrong like me will be punished?"

"For God's sake," he said, "don't talk so!"

"But *do* you? It makes one think of these things when one knows one has only a very little time to live. *You* can't forgive me—you said so."

"I do," he said; "I forgive you freely. If I could undo your wretchedness by giving my life for you, I'd give it. You don't know how I loved you—what it meant to me to find you gone! Ah, Mamie, how could you do it?"

The tears stood in her eyes, as she lifted her white face to him.

"I'm ashamed!" she moaned. "What can I say?"

"Why?" said Heriot, at the end of a tense

pause. "Why? Did you care for him so much? If he had lived and married you, would you be happy?"

"Happy!" she echoed, with something between a laugh and a sob.

"Tell me. I hoped you'd be happy. That's true. I never wanted you to suffer for what you'd done. I suffered enough for both."

"I don't think I should have married him. I don't know; I don't think so. I knew I'd made a mistake before—oh, in the first month! If *you* haven't hated me, I have hated myself."

"And since? You've been with *her?*"

"Ever since. My poor father wanted me to go home. I wish I had! You know I've lost him—she told you that? He wanted me to go home, but I couldn't—where everybody knew! You understand? And then she moved to Balham, and we never left it till two months ago, when the cable came. We were in time to see him die. My poor father!"

He touched her hand, and her fingers closed on it.

"You oughtn't to be up here at night," he said huskily, looking at her with blinded eyes. "Didn't the man tell you that the night air was bad? And that flimsy wrap—it's no use so! Draw it across your mouth."

"What's the difference?—there, then! Shall

you—will you speak to me again after this evening, or is this the last talk we shall have? I had so much to say to you, but I don't seem able to find it now you're here. . . . If you believe that I ask your pardon on my knees, I suppose, after all, that that's everything. If ever a man deserved a good wife it was you; I realise it more clearly than I did while we were together—though I think I knew it then. . . . You never married again?"

"No," he answered; "no, I haven't married."

"But you will, perhaps? Why haven't you?"

"I'm too old, and—I cared too much for *you*."

The tears were running down her face now; she loosed his hand to wipe them away.

"Don't say I've ruined your life," she pleaded; "don't say that! My own—yes; my own—it served me right! but I've tried so hard to believe that *you* had got over it. When I read of your election, and then that you were made Solicitor-General, I was glad, ever so glad. I thought, 'He's successful; he has his career.' I've always wanted to believe that your work was enough—that you had forgotten. It wasn't so?"

"No, it wasn't so. I did my best to forget you, but I couldn't."

"Aunt Lydia said you weren't cut up at all when she saw you. You deceived her very well. 'A worthless woman,' you called me; I 'wasn't any loss'! It was quite true; but I knew you couldn't feel like that—not so soon. 'Worthless'! I've heard it every day since she told me. . . . I meant to do my duty when I married you, George; if I could have foreseen——" She broke off, coughing. "If I could have foreseen what the end would be, I'd have killed myself rather than become your wife. I was always grateful to you; you were always good to me—and I only brought you shame."

"Not 'only,'" he said; "you gave me happiness first, Mamie—the greatest happiness I've known. I loved you, and you came to me. You never understood how much I did love you—I think that was the trouble."

"'There's a word that says it all: I worship you'! do you remember saying that? You said it in the train when you first proposed to me. I refused you then—why did I ever give way! . . . How different everything would be now! You 'worshipped' me, and I——"

Her voice trailed off, and once more only the pounding of the engine broke the stillness on the deck. The ocean swelled darkly under a starless sky, and he sat beside her staring into

space. In the steerage someone played "Robin Adair" on a fiddle. A drizzle began to fall, to blow in upon them. Heriot became conscious of it with a start.

"You must go below," he said; "it's raining."

She rose obediently, shivering a little, and drawing the white scarf more closely about her neck.

"Good-night," she said, standing there with wide eyes.

He put out his hand, and her clasp ran through his blood again.

"Good-night," he repeated gently. "Sleep well."

Was it real? Was he awake? He looked after her as she turned away—looked long after she had disappeared. The fiddle in the steerage was still scraping "Robin Adair"; the black stretch of deck was desolate. A violent impulse seized him to overtake her, to snatch her back, to hold her in his arms for once, with words and caresses of consolation. "Dying"! He wondered if Davos, Algiers, the Cape, anything and everything procurable by money, could prolong her life. Then he remembered that she did not wish to live. But that was horrible! She should consult a specialist in town, and follow his advice; he would make

her promise it. With the gradual defervescence of his mood, he wondered if she was properly provided for, and he resolved to question Mrs. Baines on the point. He would elicit the information the following day, and something could be arranged, if necessary — if not with Mamie's knowledge, then without it.

The morning was bright, and Mamie was in her chair when he came up from the saloon after breakfast. As he approached, she watched him expectantly, and it was impossible to pass without a greeting. It was impossible, when the greeting had been exchanged, not to remain with her for a few minutes.

"How are you feeling?" he asked; "any better?"

"I never feel very bad; I'm just the same to-day as yesterday, thank you." The "thank you" was something more than a formula, and he felt it. It hurt him to hear the gratitude in her tone, natural as it might be.

"I want you to go to a good physician when you arrive," he said, "say, to Drummond; and to do just as he tells you. You *must* do that; it is a duty you owe to yourself."

She shrugged her shoulders. "What for? That I may last two years, perhaps, instead of one? It is kind of you to care, but I'm quite

satisfied as things are. Don't bother about me."

"You will have to go!" he insisted. "Before we land I shall speak to your aunt about it."

He had paused by her seat with the intention of resuming his saunter as soon as civility permitted, but her presence was subversive of the intention. He sat down beside her as he had done the previous evening. But now it was inevitable that they should speak of other subjects than infidelity and death. The sky was blue, and the white deck glistened in the sunshine. The sea before them tumbled cheerfully, and to right and left were groups of passengers laughing, flirting, doing fancy-work, or reading novels.

"You haven't told me how it was you came to the States?" she said presently; "were you in New York all the time?"

Heriot did not answer, and she waited in surprise.

"I'll tell you, if you wish," he said hastily. "I came out half meaning to marry."

"Oh!" she said, as if he had struck her.

"I thought I might be happier married. The lady and her mother were going to New York, and I travelled with them. I—I was mistaken in myself."

They were not looking at each other any

longer, and her voice trembled a little as she replied :

" You weren't fond enough of her ? "

" No," he said. " I shall never marry again ; I told you so last night."

After a long pause, she said :

" Was she pretty ? . . . Prettier than *I* used to be ? "

" She was handsome, I think. Not like you at all. Why talk about it ? . . . I'm glad I came, though, or I shouldn't have seen you. I shall always be glad to have seen you again. Remember that, after we part. For me, at least, it will never be so bitter since we've met and I've heard you say you're sorry."

" God bless you," she murmured almost inaudibly.

He left her after half an hour, but drifted towards her again in the afternoon. Insensibly they lost by degrees much of their constraint in talking together. She told him of her father's illness, of her own life in Balham ; Heriot gave her some details of his appointment, explaining that it was the duty of an Attorney-General and Solicitor-General to reply to questions of law in the House, to advise the Government, and conduct its cases, and the rest of it. By Wednesday night it was difficult to him to realise that their first interview had occurred

only forty-eight hours ago. It had become his habit on deck to turn his steps towards her, to sip tea by her side in the saloon, to saunter with her after dinner in the starlight. Even at last he felt no embarrassment as he moved towards her; even at last she came to smile up at him as he drew near. Moments there could not fail to be when such a state of things seemed marvellous and unnatural—when conversation ceased, and they paused oppressed and tongue-tied by a consciousness of the anomaly of their relations. Nevertheless such moments were but hitches in an intercourse which grew daily more indispensable to them both.

How indispensable it had become to herself the woman perceived as the end of the voyage approached; and now she would have asked no better than for them to sail on until she died. When she undressed at night, she sighed, "Another day over"; when she woke in the morning, eagerness quickened her pulses. On Saturday they would arrive; and when Friday dawned, the reunion held less of strangeness than the reflection that she and Heriot would separate again directly. To think that, as a matter of course, they would say good-bye to each other, and resume their opposite sides of an impassable gulf, looked more unnatural to her than the renewed familiarity.

Their pauses were longer than usual on Friday evening. Both were remembering that it was the last. Heriot had ascertained that Cheriton had been able to leave her but little; and the notion of providing her with the means to winter in some favourable climate was hot in his mind.

"It is understood," he said abruptly, "that you go to Drummond and do exactly as he orders? You'll not be so mad as to refuse at the last moment?"

"All right!" she answered apathetically, "I'll go. Shall I—will you care to hear what he says?"

"Your aunt has promised to write to me. By the way, there's something I want to say to-night. If what he advises is expensive, you must let me make it possible for you. I claim that as my right. I intended arranging it with Mrs. Baines, but she tells me you—you'd be bound to know where the money came from. He'll probably tell you to live abroad."

"Thank you," she said after a slight start, "I could not take your money. It is very good of you, but I would rather you didn't speak of it. If you talked for ever, I wouldn't consent."

"Mamie——"

"The very offer turns me cold. Please don't!"

"You're cruel," he said. "You're refusing to let me prolong your life. Have I deserved that from you?"

"Oh!" she cried, in a tortured voice, "for God's sake, don't press me! Leave me something—I won't say 'self-respect,' but a vestige, a grain of proper pride. Think what my feelings would be, living on money from you—it wouldn't prolong my life, George; it would kill me sooner. You've been generous and merciful to me; be merciful to me still and talk of something else."

"You are asking me to stand by and see you die. *I* have feelings, too, Mamie. I can't do it!"

"I'm dying," she said; "if it happens a little sooner, or a little later, does it matter very much? If you want to be very kind to me, to—to brighten the time that remains to me as much as you can, tell me that if I send to you when—when it's a question of days, you'll come to the place and see me again. I'd bless you for that! I've been afraid to ask you till now; but it would mean more to me than anything else you could do. Would you, if I sent?"

"Why," said Heriot labouredly, after another pause, "why would it mean so much?"

They were leaning over the taffrail; and

suddenly her head was bent, and she broke into convulsive sobs that tore his breast.

"Mamie!" he exclaimed. "Mamie, tell me!" He glanced round and laid a trembling touch on her hands. "Tell me, dear!" he repeated hoarsely. "Do you love me, then?"

Her figure was shaken by the shuddering sobs. His touch tightened to a clasp; he drew the hands down from the distorted face, drew the shaken figure closer, till his own met it—till her bosom was heaving against his heart.

"Do you love me, Mamie?"

"Yes!" she gasped. And then for an instant only their eyes spoke, and in the intensity of their eyes each gave to the other body and soul.

"Yes, I love you," she panted; "it's my punishment, I suppose, to love you too late. I shall never see you after to-morrow, till I am dying—if then—but I love you. Remember it! It's no good to you, you won't care, but remember it, because it's my punishment. You can say, 'When it was too late, she knew! She died detesting herself, shrinking at her own body, her own loathsome body that she gave to another man!' Oh"—she beat her hands hysterically against his chest

—" I hate him, I hate him! God forgive me, he's in his grave, but I hate him when I think what's been. And it wasn't his fault; it was mine, mine—my own degraded, beastly self. Curse me, throw me from you! I'm not fit to be standing here; I'm lower than the lowest woman in the streets!"

The violence of her emotion maddened him. He knew that *he* loved *her;* the truth was stripped of the disguise in which he had sought for years to wrap it—he knew that he had never ceased to love her; and a temptation to make her his wife again, to cherish and possess her so long as life should linger in her veins, flooded his reason. Their gaze grew wider, deeper still; he could feel her quivering from head to foot. Another moment, and he would have offered his honour to her keeping afresh. Some men left the smoking-room; there was the sharp interruption of laughter —the slam of the door. They both regained some semblance of self-possession as they moved apart.

" I must go down," she said. And he did not beg her to remain.

It was their real farewell, for on the morrow they could merely exchange a few words amid the bustle of arrival. Liverpool was reached early in the morning, and when he saw her,

she wore a hat and veil and was already prepared to go ashore. In the glare of the sunshine the veil could not conceal that her eyes were red with weeping, however, and he divined that she had passed a sleepless night. To Mrs. Baines he privately repeated his injunctions with regard to the physician, for he was determined to have his way; and the widow assured him that she would write to Morson Drummond for an appointment without loss of time. The delays and shouts came to an end while he was speaking to her; and the gangway was lowered, and Mamie moved forward to her side. He saw them again in the custom-house, but for a minute only, and from a distance. Evidently they got through without trouble, for when he looked across again, they had gone.

As he saw that they had gone, a sensation of blankness fell upon Heriot's mood, where he stood waiting among the scattered luggage. His life felt newly empty and the day all at once seemed cold and dark.

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XIV

The truth was stripped of the disguise in which he had sought to wrap it; he knew that he had never ceased to love her. As he had known it while she sobbed beside him on the boat, so he knew it when the Bar claimed him again and he wrestled with temptation amid his work. He might re-marry her! He could not drive this irruptive idea from his mind. It lurked there, impelled attention, dozed, woke, and throbbed in his consciousness persistently. Were he but weak enough to make the choice, the woman that he loved might belong to him once more.

Were he but weak enough! There were minutes in which he was very near to it, minutes in which the dishonour, if dishonour it were, looked as nothing to him compared with the joy of having her for his wife again. Yet were he but "weak" enough? Would it indeed be weakness—would it not rather be strength, the courage of his convictions? The longing illumined his vision, and he asked himself on what his doubt and hesitation was

based. She had sinned; but he had pardoned her sin, not merely in words, but in his heart. And she was very dear to him; and she had repented. Then why should it be impossible? What after all had they done to her, what change in the beloved identity had they wrought, those months that were past? He was aware that it was the physical side that repelled him—there had been another man. Yet if she had been a widow when he met her first, there would have been another man, and it would have mattered nothing. Did this especial sin make of a woman somebody else? Did it give to her another face, another form, another brain? Did unfaithfulness transform her personality? The only difference was the knowledge of what had happened—the woman herself was the same! But he would not vindicate his right to love her—he loved her, that was enough. In its simplicity, the question was whether he would do better to condone her guilt and know happiness, or to preserve his dignity and suffer. He could not blink the question; it confronted him nakedly when a week had worn by. Without her he was lonely and wretched; with her, while she lived, he was confident that his joy would be supreme. The step that he considered was, if anyone pleased,

revolting; but if it led to his contentment, perhaps to be "revolting" might be the height of wisdom. He must sacrifice his pride, or his peace! And at last, quite deliberately, without misgiving or a backward glance, Heriot determined to gain peace.

A few days after the arrival, Mrs. Baines had written to inform him that the physician was out of town, but now a line came to say that an appointment had been made for "Monday" and that she would communicate Dr. Drummond's pronouncement immediately they reached home after the interview. It was on Monday morning that Heriot received the note, and he resolved to go to Mamie the same evening.

The thought of the amazement that his appearance would cause her excited him wildly as he drove to Victoria. He could foresee the wonder in her eyes as he entered, the incredulity on her features as she heard what he was there to say; and the profoundest satisfaction pervaded him that he had resolved to say it. The comments that his world would make had no longer any place in his meditations; a fico for the world that would debar him from delight and censure what it could not understand! He had suffered long enough; his only regret was for the years which had been lost before he

grasped the vivid truth that, innocent or guilty, the woman who conferred happiness was the woman to be desired.

A criticism of his brother's recurred to him : " You hadn't a single taste in common ! " He had not disputed it at the time; he was not certain that he could deny it now. But there was no need to consider whether their views were kindred or opposed, whether she was defiled or stainless, when she was the woman whose magic could transfigure his existence. He was conscious that this marriage to be approved by his judgment, and condemned by Society, would be a sweeter and holier union than their first, to which she had brought purity, and indifference. As the cab sped down Victoria Street, his excitement increased, and in imagination he already clasped her and felt the warmth of her cheek against his face.

The hansom slackened, jerked to a standstill; and he leapt out and hurried to the booking-office. A train was at the point of starting. The sentiment of the bygone was quick in him as he found that he must pass through a yellow barrier on to the same platform to which he used to hasten when he went to see her in Lavender Street, Wandsworth. He had never trodden it since. A thousand associations, sad but delicious, were revived

as he took his seat, and the guard, whose countenance seemed familiar, sauntered with a green flag and a lantern past the window. Victoria slipped back. It had been in one of these compartments—perhaps in this one—that he had first asked her to be his wife. How wet her cape had been when he touched it! A porter sang out, "Grosvenor Road," and at the sound of it Heriot marvelled at having forgotten that they were about to stop there. Yes, "Grosvenor Road," and then — what next? He could not remember. But memory knocked with a louder pang as each of the places on the line was reached. When "Wandsworth Common" was cried, he glanced at the dimly-lighted station while in fancy he threaded his way to the shabby villa that had been her home. He thought that he could find it blindfold.

After this the line was quite strange to him; and now the impatience of his mood had no admixture and he trembled with eagerness to gain his destination.

"Balham!" was bawled two minutes later; and among a stream of clerks and nondescripts, he descended a flight of steps and emerged into a narrow street. No cab was visible, and, having obtained directions, he set forth for Rosalie Road afoot.

A glimpse he had of cheap commerce, of the flare of gas-jets on oranges, and eggs, and fifth-rate millinery; and then the shops and the masses were left behind, and he was in obscurity. The sound of footsteps occurred but seldom here, and he wandered in a maze of little houses for nearly half an hour before a welcome postman earned a shilling.

Rosalie Road began in darkness, and ended in a brickfield. He identified Number 44 by the aid of a vesta, and pulled the bell. Impatience was mastering him when he discerned, through the panes, a figure advancing along the passage.

His voice was strange in his ears, as he inquired if Mamie was in.

"Yessir; she's in the drorin'-room. 'Oo shall I say?"

"Sir George Heriot. Is Mrs. Baines at home?"

His title rendered the little maid incapable of an immediate response.

"Missis is out of a herrand, sir," she stammered; "she won't be long."

"When she comes in, tell her that I'm talking privately to her niece. 'Privately'; don't forget!"

She turned the handle, and Heriot followed her into the room. Vaguely he heard her announce him; he saw the room as in a mist.

Momentarily all that was clear was Mamie's face, white and wondering in the lamplight. She stood where she had been standing at his entrance, looking at him; he had the impression of many seconds passing while she only looked; many seconds seemed to go by before her colour fluttered back and she said, "You?"

"Yes, it's I. Won't you say you're glad to see me?"

"Aunt Lydia has written to you," she said, still gazing at him as if she doubted his reality. "Her letter has gone."

"I've come to hear what Dr. Drummond says."

She motioned him to a chair, and drooped weakly on to the shiny couch.

"I am not going to die," she muttered. "Your sympathy has been thrown away—I'm a fraud."

In the breathless pause he felt deafened by the thudding of his heart.

"He has given you hope?"

"He said, 'Bosh!' I told him what the doctor told me in Duluth. He said, 'Bosh!' One lung isn't quite sound, that's all; I may live to be eighty."

"O dear God!" said Heriot slowly, "I thank You!"

She gave a short laugh, harsh and bitter.

"I always posed. My last pose was as a dying woman!"

"Mamie," he said firmly—he went across to her and sat down by her side—"Mamie, I love you. I want you to come back to me, my darling. My life's no good without you, and I want you for my wife again. Will you come?"

He heard her catch her breath; she could not speak. He took her hands, and drew her to him. Their lips clung together, and presently he felt tears on his cheek.

Then she released herself with a gesture of negation.

"You are mad!" she said. "And *I* should be madder to accept the sacrifice!"

For this he was prepared.

"I am very sane," he answered. "Dearest, when you understand, you will see that it is the only reparation you can make me. Listen!"

THE END

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED, BRUNSWICK ST., STAMFORD ST., S.E. 1, AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 051374509